BENGALI FOLK-BALLADS FROM MYMENSINGH

AND

THE PROBLEM OF THEIR AUTHENTICITY

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In 1923, Dineschandra Sen, Professor of Bengali Literature, Calcutta University, historian of the classical literature of Bengal and editor of Bengali texts, edited a large volume of epic songs from the Mymensingh District of Eastern Bengal, under the title *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*; the edition was shortly afterwards followed by another volume containing the editor's prefaces and prose-translations of the same ballads in English. The beautiful ballads aroused a wave of enthusiasm in India as well as abroad and were highly appreciated and greeted with admiration by such men of letters as Romain Rolland, Maurice Maeterlinck, Sylvain Levy, George Grierson, etc.[1] Encouraged by the warm response, D. C. Sen published three more volumes of balladic texts, this time not exclusively from the Mymensingh District, entitling them *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, and their English translations "Eastern Bengal Ballads". After the last, fourth volume appeared, the readers and students of Bengali literature were confronted with a large collection of 55 epic songs, representing a completely new branch of Bengali poetry, so far unknown.[2]

The discovery of these beautiful songs was too surprising, however, not to arouse suspicions regarding their authenticity. These suspicions seem to have been aroused, first, by the language of the poems; obviously, the dialect used in the ballads and recorded as it was, cannot be considered, in the full extent, as the dialect spoken in the Mymensingh District. After that, other objections were raised, regarding the contents as well as the form of the ballads. I shall resume and discuss them in the next chapter.

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[1] The editor of the ballads published extracts of some letters appreciating the beauty of the Mymensingh ballads, in his Bengali book *Āśutosh-smritikathā*, Indian Publishing House, Calcutta, 1936, pp. 137-38.

[2] *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, pratham khaṇḍa, dvitīya saṃkhyā. Kalikātā biśvabidyālay, 1923, 2nd Ed., 1952, 34+392 pp. *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, dvitīya-chaturtha khaṇḍa, dvitīya saṃkhyā. *Ibid.* 1926-32. 486, 534 and 580 pp. A *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, Vols. I-IV, Part 1. University of Calcutta, 1923-32. 102+322, 470, 436 and 430 pp.

The result of all this uncertainty is highly regrettable. When going through various histories and surveys of Bengali literature, numerous as they are, we can see that, because of these doubts, many authors do not even mention the existence of Eastern Bengali Ballads, and others are extremely abrupt and careful in what they have to say about them. This is, of course, an intolerable state of affairs. It is necessary either to prove the ballads to be a forgery—which no one so far has seriously attempted to do, though the number of people who believe them to be such is far from negligible—or to acknowledge, on the ground of sound reasons, the authenticity of these songs. It is, in short, necessary to assign to the ballads their proper place—in the former case, along with Ossian's Ballads and other historical forgeries, in the latter, however, to see in them one of the high-points of Bengali literature. The present book hopes to be the first serious attempt towards this goal.

It would not be right to stop at this point, however. Believing in the authenticity and the folk-character of the Eastern Bengali Ballads as I do, I would like, too, to make the first step towards their full appreciation. The questions which appear to be most important are: In what does their particular beauty lie? What are their main qualities and peculiarities? In short—what is it that makes them so excellent? To answer these questions—which do not pretend to be original in any way—it is necessary first to analyze the ballads as singular units, and then as a whole, with special regard to their form and the poetic means they use, including choice of similes, metaphors, etc. Once the authenticity of the ballads is established, we can, as a matter of fact, hardly find more suitable material for the study of the aesthetics of folk-poetry. The Eastern Bengali Ballads are numerous enough to provide us with a large body of folk-verse, bound together, moreover, by common themes, revealing not only the processes of folk-creation, but also the ways of thinking, imagination and ideas of the people to whom they belong. Far from being a drawback, their epic character insofar as we want to study their similes and other figures of speech, is rather an advantage; their poetic means do not depend so much on impulses of the moment as the lyrical songs and their epic character even eliminates, to a large extent, the element of individuality. Thus it seems advisable to carry out, first of all, a detailed analysis of the ballads, and then to confront the conclusions reached with the extant lyrical songs which, however, are regrettably few.

After careful consideration, I decided to confine my analysis to ballads originating in the Mymensingh District. According to authorities such as Niharranjan Ray or Asutosh Bhattacharyya, as well as my own experience, the whole of East Bengal—present-day East Pakistan—does not represent a uniform cultural unit. There are considerable differences in the historical development, economic and living conditions, language and features of folk-culture, between, for instance, Chittagong on one hand, and Mymensingh on the other.[3] One of the aims followed by the present study is, as stated above, to contribute to a better understanding of the aesthetics of folk-poetry. This, of course, cannot be done except within a certain region, a certain cultural unit. It is clear that the mingling of materials from different milieus would result only in confusing the conclusions reached.

I have chosen Mymensingh because the majority of ballads dealt with here come from this large district; as a matter of fact, it means the exclusion of only 14 ballads out of the 55 contained in D. C. Sen's edition. I propose to use them only for comparative reasons where necessary. The rest represent a respectable quantity of more than 21,000 verses, not including prose portions, so that it is certainly quite enough material for valid research.

Moreover, it is no exaggeration to say that Mymensingh represents the very heart of the Bengali folk-culture and an exceptionally rich store of folk-art production.[4] The economic prosperity of this vast triangle between the rivers Padma and Meghna and the Garo Hills, prosperity based on the fertility of soil yielding such valuable cash-crops as jute, and on a traditional, well-developed river-transport and trade, created favourable conditions for a rich flowering of folk-art and poetry; even today, in the age of a rapid decay of folk-culture, Mymensingh is still famous for its folk-music, dances, songs, clay-figures, embroidered quilts, etc.

Before we proceed to discuss the ballads from Mymensingh, it is necessary to describe these materials in more detail.

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[3] *Cf.* Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Bānglār lok-sāhitya*. Calcutta Book House, Calcutta. 2nd Ed., 1957, p. 171.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

The ballads were collected from various villages of the district—not all the ballads are provided with the necessary localization—and most of them, 28 in number, are said by the editor to have been taken down by Chandrakumar De; three others were collected by Nagendrachandra De and two by Biharilal Roy, whose name appears, in one other case, along with that of Chandrakumar De. In seven cases, the editor omitted collector's name, but all of these seven songs seem also to have been collected by Chandrakumar De. The names of the singers from whom the ballads were obtained are mentioned only in 13 songs.

As regards length, there are considerable differences between individual ballads. There are songs of more than 1,200 verses, in one case as many as close on 1,500, and others comprising some two or three hundred lines. In a few cases, variants were found, in others collectors were able to record mere fragments. In five tales, prose portions are intermixed with verses, the total amount of prose being more than 900 lines in print.

Though most ballads deal with love, there are some exceptions. In them also, however, though they ought to be ranked as heroic or semi-historical ballads, the love motif forms a very strong element. Thus these songs can also be grouped, with full justification, along with love ballads. From the religious point of view, they present the life and characters typical of both the communities which lived, side by side, in Mymensingh until the partition of Bengal, in 1947, *i.e.*, of Hindus as well as Muslims. Though we shall have better opportunities, further on, to go into this question in more detail, let us note now that, as stated by the editor more than once, the ballads in general show a harmonious co-existence of the both communities, without religious bias on either side. The problems and conflicts the ballads record are either social or individual, but very seldom have any religious bearing. Even the fact that most of the purely 'Hindu' ballads were collected from Muslim singers is significant as showing that they were enjoyed and accepted by the members of both communities with the same eagerness.

The collectors of the ballads were, of course, not provided with the equipment of modern collectors, such as tape-recorders, cameras, etc. Their pioneer work was full of difficulties and it is not surprising to find that the results bear all the signs of amateurish work. However great these shortcomings may be, and however great the merits of the editor D. C. Sen, it is necessary to mention, with deep respect and admiration, the name of Chandrakumar De, who is the real discoverer of this forgotten and neglected branch of Bengali literature. It was he whose articles, published in the Mymensingh journal *Saurabh*, attracted the attention of D. C. Sen to the ballads, it was he who rescued these songs, literally at the last minute, from the threat of oblivion. Let us hope that his merits will be acknowledged by his own countrymen, too, which so far has not been done.

BENGALI FOLK-BALLADS FROM MYMENSINGH

I. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE BALLADS

In his "Introduction to the Bengali Literature", Nandagopal Sengupta says: "Before starting any discussion on the Mymensingh ballads, there arises the question of their antiquity and authenticity."[5] Obviously, it is necessary to pay attention to doubts concerning their authenticity, first of all. Let us summarize what various authors and authorities have said in this connection.

Among Bengalis themselves[6]—no foreigner has, to my knowledge, made any contribution in this field so far—we find three clearly discernible camps, so to speak. Whereas one group shares doubts so serious that its members are unable to accept the ballads at all, the second is more moderate in their criticism, acknowledging the ballads as genuine, in their core, but presuming many alterations and additions to have been made in the printed edition. The third group considers the ballads to be folk-products in their full extent and rejects the idea of the songs having been tampered with to any appreciable extent.

Among those who question the authenticity of the ballads, Poet Jasimuddin and Nandagopal Sengupta must be mentioned first. The latter has, in his "Introduction to the Bengali Literature" mentioned above, devoted a large space to the discussion of the matter. He starts by affirming the generally religious character of Bengali Literature and pointing out that the Mymensingh ballads are completely devoid of any religious influence: "If the Mymensingh ballads belong to the old literature, it is necessary to say that it is the only section of the old literature in which man free of religious enclosure can be clearly seen and in which his natural rights on joys and sorrows, on hopes and desperation were acknowledged with respect. . . But because of this caste and social opposition, human appeal of some parts of the stories and psychological analysis, and especially because of skilful use of word-combinations and rhymes, there arise doubts concerning the antiquity of the ballads. Many people believe they were written in this age, and if dialectical and archaic words were not used intentionally in them, it would have come out much earlier" (p. 35). N. G. Sengupta then deals, in large, with all the arguments he can find against both the antiquity and authenticity of the ballads, stating that "doubts in both these directions are basically the same" (p. 36). He stresses the religious character of the two main branches of classical Bengali Literature, the *Maṅgal-kāvyas* and the *Vaishnav* poetry, concluding as follows: "In this way, these two great sections of the old Bengali Literature fell into the grip of religious glory, cutting their connection with everyday life—yet it is the literature of the old Bengali intelligentsia" (p. 37). After this statement, N. G. Sengupta confronts this old literature with the Mymensingh ballads: "How can, within this frame, a large section of literature such as the Mymensingh ballads, ignore this all-pervading tradition, arise by its own forces and develop a stature in which there is no single trace of the greatness of gods and which is simple and accomplished by the mere pursue of the human hearts' inclinations and the resignation in the hands of Nature? It may be that the sight and feelings of an illiterate are much more alive than those of a literate, and his way of thinking, not falling into ideological whirlpools, gets confused much less—but does not the cultural influence of the country and the ideological streams of the country pollute even the lowest strata of society? The exclusively human character of the Mymensingh ballads and their integrity, strength and individuality stimulate doubts concerning their antiquity'' (p. 37). After this, N. G. Sengupta goes over to the form of the ballads ; but it is rather surprising to hear him say that, in contrast to the poets of *Maṅgal-kāvyas* and Vishnuist songs, who always followed the classical books of poetics, "the poets of the Mymensingh ballads are, as far as possible, nearly always original in the actions they retell as well as in the descriptions or in the use of similes'' (p. 37). The last part of the present book is devoted to the similes and metaphors used in the Mymensingh ballads, showing, in full accord with their folk-character, just the opposite of what N. G. Sengupta calls their 'originality'. N. G. Sengupta obviously forgets the folk-character of the ballads—otherwise he would not be surprised to find that these folk-poets "say always exactly what comes on the first impulse into one's mind''—"the simple, pure words everywhere'' (p. 38). As a similar ground for suspicion, he ranks the observation that even the rhyming and the flow of the verses are 'skilful'.

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[5] *Bānglā sāhityer bhūmikā*. Chakravarty, Chatterji and Co., Calcutta, 1940, pp. 35-36.

[6] To collect opinions of as many as possible, I not only went into books and articles, but had also the pleasure of discussing the matter with many Bengali scholars and people in Mymensingh itself.

On the basis of these 'two suspicions', N. G. Sengupta concludes that "the stories of the ballads are old, some few parts are also old, but the ballads were written from start to finish in our time, having been polished and dressed in a costume as ancient as possible" (p. 38).

N. G. Sengupta thereupon brings a series of very penetrating and interesting observations, concerning the secular character of the ballads, their realistic approach to life, etc. He very rightly ridicules those who have compared these ballads with Shakespeare's dramas, stressing the fundamental difference between these two literary phenomena. But at the end, he once more gives way to his doubts about the authenticity of the ballads, finding their treatment of class-problems, family-problems and love-problems to be quite out of keeping with the Indian (or Bengali) tradition.

Thus Nandagopal Sengupta in his book published in 1940. Whereas his suspicions are confined, to a great extent, to the antiquity of the ballads and only partly to their authenticity and their folk-origin, the main opponent of these songs, Poet Jasimuddin, attacks the very core of these creations. He has expressed his views in his book "Whom I Saw"[7] and, on a still larger scale, in endless discussions which we had on the subject during our unforgettable trips to the villages of East Bengal and our stay in Dacca, in 1960.

Nearly thirty years ago, Jasimuddin was appointed by D. C. Sen to collect further specimens of the Eastern Bengali folk-epics. Jasimuddin was surprised that he was no longer able to find any ballads of the same kind as Chandrakumar De had found in such abundance, and he began to suspect C. K. De. "Trying to find Mymmensingh ballads, suspicions arose in my mind that they have not been collected in exactly

[7] *Yāder dekhechhi*. B. C. Bose, Dacca, s.d. (*Forward*, dated the 21st January, 1952).

the same way as they are sung in villages. The collector has coloured them a bit'' (p. 77), he says literally. In his discussion with Rabindranath Tagore, Jasimuddin put his suspicions in a much stronger formulation: ''The Mymensingh ballads are to be found nowhere. Chandrakumar De took the frames of folk-stories and made them up with texture of various creation and thus gave them to Dinesbabu. And they now go under the name of illiterate village poets'' (p. 94). On the objection of Rabindranath that there are portions in the ballads which he does not think are the work of C. K. De, Jasimuddin replies: ''That is true. These portions are very short folk-songs current until now. C. K. De collected them and filled with them the frames of folk-stories. It was these portions of the Mymensingh ballads which attracted the attention of critics at home as well as abroad. Also parts of the stories which were used as frames and filled up with this texture have some value'' (p. 94).

In our discussions, Jasimuddin pointed out further arguments in favour of his suspicions that the ballads as they were printed were actually written by Chandrakumar De. First of all he said that he was not able to trace either the ballads themselves, or the singers whose names C. K. De gave as the sources for the collected ballads. Secondly, no village-singer is able, according to Jasimuddin, to commit to memory such long songs. And thirdly, C. K. De was an educated man, quite capable of writing poetry himself.[*]

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[*] In sharp contrast to these words of Jasimuddin is what D. C. Sen writes in his *Purātanī*, published most probably in 1939: ''The poet Jasimuddin had, in the beginning, some doubts as to whether these beautiful songs are genuine or not, but finally, after having himself wandered around villages and heard many songs, he wrote me: 'The doubts which I formerly had were due to my faults. Will nobody see now

Serious doubts were expressed also by Prof. Sukumar Sen in his well-known *Bāngālā sāhityer itihās* (History of the Bengali Literature), Vol. I.[9] His reservations, however, are mostly against the language of the ballads in which "in spite of all efforts to maintain the forms of the local dialect, it was not possible to conceal the influence of the Calcutta region" (p. 947). S. Sen illustrates his statement with numerous examples. Besides, he states that "in many ballads, parts of other stories were added or changed and expanded for the purpose of the narration to give it a romantic form" (pp. 948-9). And he concludes: "It is impossible to say that some of the romantic creations within the ballads published by the Calcutta University, which have fascinated educated readers, are quite genuine in all their parts. The editor himself admitted that no ballad was possible to obtain from one single singer. That is why the printed ballads cannot be accepted as unadulterated samples of folk-literature" (p. 949)[10].

Against all these doubts and suspicions, we have voices which do not doubt the authenticity of the ballads at all; and it is interesting to note that they belong to specialists who have proved their deep knowledge of the Bengali folk-literature by contributions of their own, such as Prof. Asutosh Bhattacharya, from the Calcutta University, the author of *Bānglār lok-sāhitya* (The Bengali Folk-Literature) mentioned above, Prof. Md.

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tears which I have shed sprinkling my chest? Rabindranath himself could be proud if creating songs like these ballads.' The truth cannot be maintained without doubts. . . ." (*Purātanī*. Gurudas Chatterji. Calcutta, s.d., p. 9).

[9] Published by Modern Book Agency, Calcutta, 2nd Ed., 1948.

[10] Because of these doubts, S. Sen has not even mentioned the Mymensingh ballads in his valuable *History of Bengali Literature*, written in English and published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1960.

Mansoor Uddin, from Dacca, with his editions of Eastern Bengali folk-songs,[11] Raośan Izdani, from Mymensingh, with his book *Momenśāhīr lok-sāhitya* (The Folk-Literature of Mymensingh),[12] or Chittaranjan Deb with *Pallīgīti o Pūrbabaṅga* (Village Poetry and East Bengal).[13]

Let us try, now, to find answers to all these complicated questions which arise in connection with the authenticity of the Eastern Bengali ballads. As we have seen, the doubts and suspicions of the above-mentioned scholars can be grouped into three categories:

(1) those based on the fact that the Mymensingh ballads are no longer to be found in the villages of Mymensingh,
(2) those arising from the undeniable differences between the language of the ballads and the spoken dialect of Mymensingh,
(3) those concentrating around the contents and form of the ballads, especially the secular and romantic character of their themes, the colouring, etc.

1. Thanks to a UNESCO scholarship, I was able to spend, in the autumn of 1960, three months in East Pakistan. I used the opportunity to travel, accompanied by the Poet Jasimuddin, through the eastern sub-divisions of the Mymensingh District, looking for the ballads in villages. I must confess that the result was the same as that reported by Jasimuddin about his search for ballads, some thirty years ago.

This is, however, no reason to suspect the existence of ballads at all. The obvious explanation is that the ballads as such died out, along with their last singers (*gāyen*), shortly after they were recorded by Chandrakumar De and his colleagues. It is certainly nothing improbable with a certain species of folk-poetry which suffers severely from the progress of modern civilization and life. And it should be borne in mind that the ballads in question, as testified to by the collectors and the editor, were never the common property of the village community in the sense that anybody could reproduce them, as is the case with lyrical folk-songs; they are too long to be simply picked up and remembered by the ordinary person. Their knowledge was always the hereditary property of certain singers or groups who, at most, passed them on only to their pupils. They were seldom sung solo, the main singer being accompanied by musicians and chorus. It meant that these performances required a whole group, professional to a certain degree; and the disintegration of such groups, resulting from economic and social changes in the village communities, must have brought with it the decay of the ballads in the form in which they were recorded, so to speak, in the last hour of their existence. Thus it is only natural that Jasimuddin, unable to find the ballads themselves, was equally unable to find the singers whose names are cited by C. K. De.

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[11] *Hārāmaṇi*, Vols. 1-5, Calcutta and Dacca, 1930-60.

[12] Published by the Bengali Academy, Dacca, 1960.

[13] Published by Katakatha, Calcutta, s.d. (1953).

As a matter of fact, even before entrusted with the task by Prof. D. C. Sen, the collector Chandrakumar De anticipated the rapid disappearance of these ballads. In his article "Mālīr yogān", published in the Mymensingh monthly *Saurabh*[14], in April-May, 1914, he mentioned the pure beauty and exceptional value of these songs and said : "We think that for a long time already, these valuable gems are getting lost one after another; with some effort, some of them can still be collected." And C. K. De gave also four reasons for his fear of the quick disappearance of the ballads; he said that they have never been printed, that they were no more treated with respect, that people cease to understand their language fully, and that each group of singers jealously gaurds their compositions so that their rivals cannot get hold of them. The farther development showed that his fears were reasonable enough.

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[14] Vol. 2, No. 7, pp. 212-8.

We do not find the ballads in the villages of Mymensingh any more, but there are many persons who testify to have heard, in their childhood, the ballads sung in the same way as they were edited. Among those who confirmed this, let me mention at least two—Mr. Azhaul Islam, now in Dacca, who heard the ballad *Mahuyā* in 1934, and Mr. Krishna Goswami, now Professor at the Vidyasagar College, Calcutta. Even a written testimony can be quoted; Jatindranath Mazumdar wrote, in *Saurabh*, in an article called *Pūrbabaṅga gītikā*: "In my childhood, I heard in the house of some people belonging to the lower classes of my village, *Bādyānīr gān (Mahuyā)*, *Bheluyār gān*, *Kānchanmālār gān*, *Mānjurmār gān* and some other songs." [15] And Raosan Izdani, who was a neighbour of Chandrakumar De, wrote in his book: "My neighbour Chandrakumar De collected the stories exactly as he heard them. But he changed in a few songs unproperly the names; he himself admitted it during his life-time, sitting in his house; for instance, the title *Mahuyā* instead of *Bādyānīr pālā*, or *Unrā bāidyā* he changed into *Humrā bède*, the ballad *Ālāl-Dulāl* was changed into *Deoyānā Madinā*, etc. The basic think is all right; that is why we do not consider Chandrakumar De, because of this trifle mistake, unworthy of pardon.''[16]

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[15] *Saurabh*, Vol. 16, No. 10, p. 321.

It is also significant that not a single person who commented upon the ballads in the Mymensingh journal *Saurabh*, such as Surendrakisor Chakrabarti, Tarinikanta Mazumdar or Sudhansubhushan Roy, had any doubts whatsoever about the authenticity of the ballads, though most of them seem to be contemporaries of C. K. De and moreover persons from Mymensingh interested in folk-poetry; it is hardly probable that C. K. De could pass off forgeries without a single comment from all these people. Instead they have much to say about the ballads, correcting, for instance, inaccuracies of the editor, but they do not even hint at any serious doubts or suspicions.

Besides do not let us forget that not all the ballads from Mymensingh published in the Calcutta University edition, were collected by C. K. De, as stated above. In face of this fact and considering that ballads collected by Nagendrachandra De and Biharilal Roy, do not differ in any way from those collected by Chandrakumar De, it is simply foolish to presume that the ballads could have been obtained in any other way than by being collected from village singers. Or are we to presume a plot in which the whole of Mymensingh is implicated?

On the other hand, it is not possible even to say that the ballads have completely died out. They have perished only in a form in which they were collected and edited; but their stories still survive in other forms, such as *kissā*, *lambā gīt*, etc. The main point of difference from the ballads (*gītikā*) seems to be that they are much more easily sung or recited, because they are reproduced by gifted singers and narrators more or less extempore ; *i.e.*, the singer has to remember only the story and perhaps certain parts, refrains and lyrical insertions, retelling the story either in prose or in verse which, of course, is far from being as elaborate and skilful as the verses recorded in our ballads.

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[16] Raośan Izdani, *Momenśāhīr lok-sāhitya*, ed. cit., p. 57.

Many of these *kissās* have been collected and preserved in the Bengali Academy, Dacca—let us hope that they will be published, too, and thus made accessible. I found there, for instance, a variant of the ballad *Mahuyā*, collected by Abdul Majid Talukdar in Mymensingh, file No. 2, though considerably different from the printed version and with a different end, and many other *kissās* and epic compositions, having much in common with the Mymensingh ballads.

There are, however, also printed songs which can be ranked basically in the same category as our ballads. They are called *puthi* in East Pakistan [17] and contain love stories, heroic narrations and fairy tales. Though these writings follow the tradition of the so-called *kabiwālār gān*, which flourished especially in the 19th century, they are, unfortunately, practically ignored by historians of Bengali literature, being considered vulgar and without literary value. But, actually, they are of great value, especially from the sociological point of view, but also as literature, for they have much to say about the taste of the broader masses for whom they were intended. Besides, in a sense, they are direct continuations—and I would say, the only continuations—in the line of development of mediaeval Bengali poetry, interrupted by the rise of a modern literature. We cannot, however, analyze them here. Let us, at least, remind the reader of some interesting points they contain.

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[17] Most of them are published, at the present time, by the Hamidiya Library, Dacca.

To be exact, these *puthis* represent, in the field of written literature, a direct counterpart to the Mymensingh ballads. They cannot be counted as true folk-poetry—their authors are educated men striving to retell and remould, in most cases, old themes and stories in a new form (and, which is interesting to note, often with a certain moral tendency) and their texts were composed to be printed—but they have much in common with our ballads; it seems that the same stories as were known among the country people, were sometimes re-written by authors of *puthis* (approximately in the same way as the stories of various *Maṅgal-kāvyas by the poets* in previous centuries), or sometimes remoulded and retold by folk-poets, in which case they were never committed to writing, until Chandrakumar De and his colleagues collected them. In the former case, the compositions were read, in the latter, memorized by the singers. Both species have much in common, in their aesthetics, too. It is only natural that the authors of both kinds, poets as well as folk-poets, deliberately used means favoured by listeners and readers, such as certain similes, narrators' turns of speech and even whole passages. The border-line between the two is then sometimes hardly visible at all.

All *puthis* do not, however, retell only old stories and tales. Hundreds of booklets have come out in print, both in East and West Bengal, recounting events which really happened, from important historical happenings to local slanders, murders, brawls, etc. We know their counterparts in Europe, Turkey, and China, *e.g.*, the so-called " Bänkelgesänge " in German, *kramárské pisnê* in Czech, *destan* in Turkish, etc.[18] To a certain extent, they played the role of the present-day newspaper and must have been short-lived, insofar as they reported on certain events which aroused interest and then quickly fell into oblivion again. But sometimes, these " reports " succeeded in bringing something more than a mere retelling ; either the stories were so interesting, or the way in which they were told so effective that people liked to listen to them (or read them) regardless of their topicality or even whether the event depicted really happened or not. They were transformed into " tales in verses ", or even " novels in verses " and preserved either in printed editions (*puthi*) or in the oral traditions (ballads). Here we are not so much concerned with the former ; in the latter, the ballads created on the ground of real happenings started to develop and to be remoulded by the singers, mingled with other epic compositions, interspersed by lyrical portions and enriched by episodes and elements from fairy-tales, until this development resulted in what we know as the Mymensingh ballads. Do not let us forget the variants which are included in the edition of Dineschandra Sen, too, and which must have been far more numerous. They show us, sometimes, how the same basic story developed in different ways and directions.[19]

I do not believe that these ballads could have been sung extempore, as *lambā gīt* and *kissās* are sung or narrated today. In this respect, the ballads rather remind us of the way *Maṅgal-kāvyas*, *Rāmāyaṇ* and other classical works were related, in former times. Many ballads are said by the collector to have been collected from more than one singer; there are torsos and songs without the end or the beginning; there are very similar or even identical portions in different songs and variants, etc. All this seems to indicate that the ballads were really learned by heart and then sung, naturally with all the changes, mistakes, omissions, etc., which cannot be avoided in the case of such long compositions. And there must also be various alterations and changes made by the singers intentionally, for different reasons—interpolations from other compositions and insertions of lyrical verses liked by the audience, innovations and improvements found by singers, etc. Above all, then, the language of the ballads was undergoing changes similar to those of the spoken dialect, archaisms being replaced by contemporary terms and words, unless they were preserved for the sake of rhyme or for aesthetical reasons. But we shall deal with the question of the language of the ballads in the next paragraph.

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[18] On the history of this genre of folk-literature, *cf.* Georg Jacob, *Zur Geschichte des Bänkelsangs*. Litterae Orientales, 1930, 41, pp. 3-15.

[19] *Cf.* especially the ballad *Rūpabatī*, in the 1st Vol. of D. C. Sen's edition.

In consideration of these changes, it is extremely difficult to say anything more definite about the age of the ballads, to speak of their antiquity. Their editor D. C. Sen, obviously influenced by his patriotic feelings, dated the ballads rather too far into the past; he assigned some of them to the 16th, 15th or even 14th century, unable to give other reasons than rather vague "impression of antiquity" or social aspects which, as known, can be very misleading in such cases. There are, no doubt, old or even ancient portions, but the whole treatment of the stories, their ideology and psychological approach, point rather to more recent times. In this point, I agree with Nandagopal Sengupta, sharing his doubts concerning the antiquity of the songs.[20] But, unlike him, I have no doubts at all as far as their authenticity is concerned.

2. Prof. Sukumar Sen is certainly right in stating that there are many differences between the language of the ballads and the spoken dialect of Mymensingh ; he chooses, in discussing this question in his *Bāṅgālā sāhityer itihās*, some instances, rather at random, and he could undoubtedly have given many more. But again, these differences cannot in themselves invalidate the authenticity of the ballads.

As a matter of fact, it would be rather surprising if the ballads were reproduced, in the printed edition, in the exact language in which they were sung, considering the way they had to pass before they appeared in print. Chandrakumar De and his colleagues were no trained linguists or even dialectologists, and had practically no knowledge of the correct orthography in which the individual words should be transcribed. Neither was Dineschandra Sen a man with such a qualification and training ; and moreover, he was not a native from Mymensingh, his knowledge of the actual dialect spoken in Mymensingh being a bit uncertain. Thus it must have happened very often that a dialectical form, for instance, were replaced by a 'correct' one by the collectors, or by what D. C. Sen considered to be the correct form.

On the other hand, however, we could hardly expect to find, in compositions of this kind, a true replica of the spoken dialect of the region in question ; it simply does not happen. Even the illiterate folk-poet knows a bit more than only his own dialect and he does not try particularly to use purely dialectical forms and words. Just the opposite, he often intentionally makes use of 'learned' words and literary forms, to show his knowledge and 'ability' or to add interest to his composition; besides, metrical reasons, rhyme system, etc., also play their role. In short, folk-songs can hardly be used as reliable materials for dialectological purposes.[21]

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[20] This problem is dealt with, in more detail, in the concluding chapter of the present study.

It is not difficult to find the same words, which S. Sen quoted from Mymensingh ballads as uncorrect, in other texts of folk-poetry from the same district, for instance in Md. Mansoor Uddin's *Hārāmaṇi*, in Raośan Izdani's *Momenśāhīr lok-sāhitya*, in poems printed in the journal *Saurabh*, etc. Thus Prof. Sen raised objections to *natun* (news), but in folk-songs from Mymensingh, *natun* as well as the *nutan* is used interchangeably, along with the dialectical *nayā*;[22] *śuniyā*, instead of the dialectical form *śuinyā*, can be compared with numerous instances of the use of the past participle in the literary form, e.g., *dekhiyā* in Raośan Izdani's book, p. 32, last verse, or p. 33, 2nd verse; *bailyā*, and not *kayyā*, as asked for by S. Sen, is to be found in Izdani's book, p. 65, 3rd verse (*putru putru bailyā māy rodano karla*), etc.

In short, Prof. S. Sen and others who share his objections on linguistic grounds, are quite right in affirming that the language of the Mymensingh ballads does not represent a pure, unmixed dialect of the district in question; but to suspect, for this reason, the authenticity of the ballads seems to be unreasonable.

[21] This conclusion was drawn as early as in 1859, by F. Sušil, collector of Moravian folk-songs, in his Preface to the 2nd Edition of his *Moravské národni písně* (Moravian Folk-Songs).

[22] *See*, for instance, *nutan khānā* (new food) in a *Bāromāsī* published in *Hārāmaṇi*, Vol. I., p. 82.

3. The most serious doubts and suspicions are those concerning the stories of the ballads and their profound difference from what we know of traditional Bengali (and Indian) literature, the completely secular character of the ballads and the way in which their themes are treated. These doubts were outspokenly expressed, as we have seen already, by Nandagopal Sengupta, Sukumar Sen and Jasimuddin, but they are shared, I am afraid, by many more Bengali literary historians and critics.

These objections are too serious to be simply overlooked or answered by the mere statement that in folk-epics, as opposed to art-poetry, such deviations from type are possible. We must try to find an explanation.

First of all, let us answer the question: Are the themes, their treatment (the romantic approach, as it is called by some opponents of the ballads) and the secularity of the ballads truly so completely exceptional within the pre-modern Bengali literature?[23] I think those who answer this question in the affirmative make a very unfortunate mistake which, however, is to be met with in many histories and surveys of Bengali literature; they understand, under this term, only the official Hindu literature, with its Vishnuist *padas*, *Maṅgal-kāvyas* and Bengali adaptations of Sanskrit works, paying no or very little attention to its, so to say, margin-products and to its Muslim branch. And yet it must be realized that with these ballads, we move on the very outskirts of literature, and moreover, that they arose in the eastern part of Bengal, where the Muslim literature must have exercised its influence for a considerable spell of time.

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[23] New light was thrown on this problem by Tarapada Bhattacharyya, in his recent book *Baṅgasāhityer itihās*, pp. 354-76, which I shall discuss in the concluding chapter of the present study.

The history of a literature is far from being such a simple and straightforward phenomenon as it sometimes appears to be from a mere survey or a textbook showing only its peaks and summits or, in the best case, schools and main trends. Besides official poets and their creations, there always exists a large field of folk-literature, generally much worse preserved and much less investigated than the art-literature, and there exist also—and most probably have always existed—various deviations from the official stream of literary development, popular and usually unpretentious works meant to be means of amuzement for wide masses of people, in towns as well as in the country, and even 'works' corresponding to the lower tastes of certain sections of the inhabitation, never recognized as literature at all. But, in spite of this position, they exist and even flourish, from time to time, forming 'schools' of their own and not always as short-lived as they would seem to be.

Let us not be misled by the fact that the samples of these margin-types of literature and of folk-poetry are comparatively scarce and recent. This misleading fact cannot be taken as a testimony to the quantitave proportion between the official and the unofficial literature. Printing was introduced, in Bengal as elsewhere in India, rather late and still later was printing used for the popular dissemination of literature. Before that, official literature was preserved by copying the manuscripts, and it is not surprising to find that *only* official works were copied. The profane literature had no place among the manuscripts, always looked upon as something rather sacred.

But the history of Bengali art-literature itself contains numerous hints—and often more than mere hints—of the existence of a rich folk-literature, with a centuries-long tradition of its own, practically unbroken and continuing from very remote times up to our days. Analyzing more carefully one branch of ancient and mediaeval Bengali poetry after another, we nearly always come across peculiarities and features which, in my view, are fully explainable only on the presumption of a fully-developed folk-poetry, acting either as a source—in both contents and form—or as a remoulding force able to change the character of even traditional Sanskrit themes such as great epics and *purāṇas*.

The most obvious example are *Maṅgal-kāvyas*, the very beginnings of which, in the Bengali literature, are so closely bound up with folk-legends and narratives that they are practically inseparable from them; Asutosh Bhattacharyya has done a great work, in this direction, just because of his profound knowledge of both *Maṅgals* and of Bengali folk-literature.[24] Among the basic stories and episodes of various *Maṅgal-kāvyas*, there are many the origin of which must be looked for directly in the folk-poetry, such as the story of Behulā and Lakhindar, in *Manasā-maṅgal*, or the greater part, if not the whole, of the Kālketu story, in *Chaṇḍī-maṅgal*. But even in those compositions the stories of which stem from the common Indian store of puranic mythology, the folk-influence is strong enough to change and remould not only characters—as, for instance, that of the god *Śiva*—but also the very attitude to the pantheon of Hindu gods, their deeds and behaviour. I do not believe that it was Bipradās who changed the god Śiva into a living figure with human features prevailing over the divine ones, or Krittivās who made the hero Rāma into a Bengali; it was the genius of the Bengali people, the echo of which found its expression in the works of these, and other, great poets.

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[24] *Cf.* His *Baṅglā Maṅgalkāvyer itihās*, A. Mukherjee & Co., Calcutta, 3rd Ed., 1958.

It is a pity that we possess only very fragmentary and unsatisfactory knowledge of the biographies of old and mediaeval Bengali poets. But even the little we know shows in a convincing way that the majority of these poets were originally simple country people, not the offspring of poets' or courtiers' families; and it is not difficult to reconstruct, in rough outlines, the milieu in which they grew up and the influences which must have left their traces on the poets' minds. It seems more than probable that vernacular folk-poetry and prose were more influential factors than the high Sanskrit literature.

There are also other circumstances indicating that most probably there never existed, before the beginning of the modern age, any deep gulf between Bengali art-poetry and the folk-literature such as is usual in other literatures. Thus let us remember that in Bengal, literature was written, for long centuries, not only in Bengali, as spoken and understood by the people, but also in other languages, especially in Sanskrit and, later on, in Persian. It is only natural that the so-called 'high' literature—or, better, 'highest' literature—usually chose these languages, foreign as they always were to the people of Bengal; these works were not meant for simple readers and listeners, but conveyed ideas and feelings foreign to them or even hostile towards them. This would seem to be the main reason why a court-literature, as we find it, for instance, in Persian, or, to remain on Indian soil, in Urdu and Telugu, is, in Bengali, practically non-existent. These close connections between art and folk-poetry can be seen very distinctly in the poetic forms of both these branches of Bengali poetry; the *payār* and *tripadī* of *Maṅgal-kāvyas* and different Bengali

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Rāmāyaṇs and *Mahābhārats* are essentially identical with the metrical forms found in present-day epical folk-songs, *gāthās*, *gītikās*, *lambā gīts*, *paṭuyār saṅgīts*, etc. And the majority of lyrical folk-songs of East Bengal, such as *meyelī gān*, *rākhāli gān*, etc., show a very close resemblance to the classical Bengali Vishnuist *padas*.

In another study,[25] I tried to show that the folk-poetry was most probably a rich source from which the classical poets freely borrowed and took not only similes, metaphors, etc., but also whole poetic units. I refer here to the well-known *Bāromāsī*, the song of twelve months, which, I believe, was taken over complete from the folk-literature into the classical poetry. Certainly many other instances could be quoted, in this connection, to support our thesis of very close contacts and interaction between the two branches of Bengali literature.

There was, however, between them, one very profound and striking difference. In the art-poetry, no other works were able to gain official recognition but those dealing with religious themes or feelings, or, at least (and very often), using a religious garb to convey human feelings (*cf.* love-poetry around the Krishṇa-Rādhā legend) or to tell human stories (episodes in *Maṅgal-kāvyas* etc.). Such a restriction certainly did not apply to the folk-poetry—as is evident not only from fairy-tales, but also from various songs and narratives in verse, or the *Bāromāsī* quoted above, the latter has evidently a very long tradition in the Bengali folk-poetry, though it is, in the overwhelming majority of examples, completely devoid of any religious implications. It is typical that, whereas in folk-poetry, the *Bāromāsī* is presented, in most cases, as an independent love-story,

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[25] *The Development of the Bāromāsī in the Bengali Literature*. Archiv orientální 29, 1961, No. 4, pp. 582-619. Reprinted in *Folklore*, Vol. III, No. 4 (pp. 161-75), 5 (pp. 202-12), 6 (pp. 254-68).

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it has to be inserted, as an episode, into a 'religious' composition in the classical literature (a *maṅgal*, *Rāmāyaṇ*, etc.), or to be retold as a *Bāromāsī* of Rādhā; otherwise it would not be recognized, most probably just because of its secular character. As a matter of fact, we have but one instance of an independent secular *Bāromāsī* in Bengali art-poetry; it is *Dāminī-charitra*, published by Sukumar Sen,[26] the text of which derives from a manuscript, which is very exceptional.

This religious restriction had, of course, no validity in the Muslim branch of Bengali literature—here, by the way, we find *Bāromāsīs* much more akin to the folk ones. And if we can easily explain the secularity of our ballads as stemming from the tradition of Bengali folk-literature, we can equally well seek the source of their 'romanticism' in the ideological world of Muslim literature, following Persian patterns and full of love-stories which must have been very attractive for unsophisticated listeners. And the combination of these two sources, along with the popularity of poetic 'reports' of real happenings and events, mentioned above, resulted in the Mymensingh ballads which, seen from this point of view, undoubtedly do not appear foreign or improbable on Bengali soil.

For all these reasons, I sincerely believe that all the doubts concerning the authenticity of the Mymensingh ballads are groundless, that these beautiful songs really belong to the sphere of the Bengali folk-poetry. Here, however, it is necessary to clarify in what sense the attribute 'folk' is to be understood. The historian of the Czech nation and literature Z. Nejedly was certainly right when stating that the attribute 'folk' must be a result, not a starting-point, of research.[27]

[26] *Viśvabhāratī patrikā*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 100-14.
[27] *Národopisny věstník ceskoslovansky*, Vol. 1, 1906, p. 210.

I confess it is a rather complicated matter. The majority of our ballads contain colophons giving, exactly as the old and mediaeval Bengali compositions, the name of the author or authors of the ballad. Evidently the followers of the so-called production theory of folk-poetry would, at once, exclude the ballads from folk-literature —if the names given in the colophons should really represent individual poets of these compositions. Even this, however, cannot be taken for granted. With the one exception of the poetess Chandrāvatī, who is an historical figure in Bengali literature, we know practically nothing about the poets named. On the other hand, it is equally possible that many of these names belong not to authors, but to singers of the ballads. And lastly, we have no possibility to find out to what extent the ballads have been changed since the time they were created. The whole question is further complicated by the circumstance that, in the individual ballads, more than one name appears in the colophon, so that the poems seem to be composed by more than one author, one poet, for instance, composing the first part, another the second and yet another the final portion. But is such a process possible at all, if we suppose that the ballads were never written down—and we have no reason to suppose that they ever were—and that they were preserved only by oral tradition? To be frank, I cannot imagine any practical way in which such a 'collective' work could be done. On the other hand, it is an established fact that both the authors and the singers may put their names into colophons; the *bāul*-songs of Lālan Fakīr or Pāgal Kānāi are sung, until today, under their names, but I myself heard singers, in East Pakistan, singing folk-songs with their own names in colophons, though they were obviously not composed by themselves. Moreover, the collectors collected ballads usually from more than one singer, getting one portion from this man and another from that man, often being unable to collect the whole ballad at all.

Thus it is possible to explain the names in the colophons in different ways. One would be to take one of the names as being that of the author of the original version of the ballad, of the story itself, and the rest as names of various folk-poets who, having taken over the original composition, 're-wrote' it, leaving also their names behind. Another explanation is offered by the possibility that the individual parts of the original story were the work of various folk-poets, whose names have been preserved.[28] And the last—that all the names, or all excepting one, belong to singers who, of course, never reproduced the ballad word by word, but actively contributed to its final shape, recorded in the printed edition; against this, however, one could object that none of the names contained in colophons is identical with the names of the singers cited by the collectors.

We know, from the sphere of the Bengali art-poetry, that tradition never prevented anybody from changing or 're-writing' literary texts. Even when works were copied, again and again, various changes were made in the texts—which could easily have been avoided—so that it is practically impossible today to reconstruct the original version of, for instance, Krittivās' *Rāmāyaṇ* or another classical Bengali work.

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[28] It is a real pity that the collectors did not mention from whom the individual parts of the ballads were collected; it would show whether what we are dealing with here are not conglomerates of different versions of individual ballads, each version having been composed by another folk-poet. This explanation would seem the most plausible.

A similar process can be adduced in the field of Bengali folk-literature. Among the folk-*Bāromāsīs*, there is a whole group which I called, in my study mentioned above, '*Bāromāsīs* of test'; many instances of this type can be obtained even today, with a colophon quoting the name of a certain Śrīdhar Bāniyā—but the texts differ considerably from each other.

We need not be surprised by the occurrence of these names—to whomever they may belong—in the folk-songs. There seems to have ever existed, in Bengal as elsewhere in India, a certain bias against 'anonymous' creations; those without any author were often ascribed either to mythological personalities—like *Mahābhārata* to Vyāsa or folk-wisdoms to the legendary Khanā—or to great poets; there appear, under Kālidāsa's name, works which he can scarcely have written, and we are faced with a very similar situation in going through the Bengali Vishnuist *padas*. Especially the case of the so-called *Khanār bachan*—folk-sayings concerning tasks in the fields, advice to country-people, etc.—is typical and significant here.

On the other hand, even literature can provide evidence of the desire of simple people to have their names preserved in poetic compositions. In his well-known novel *Padmānadīr mājhi* (The Boatman on the Padmā River), Manik Bandyopadhyay puts the following ideas into the mouth of Hossain Mian: "There was in some corner of Hossain's mind a kind of poetic instinct. Perhaps in a different context of life he would have composed lyrics, and of them a few might have found a place in the deathless treasury of hoary, unwritten folk-verse. Perhaps in meadows and on river banks and in courtyards illuminated by homely torches, Hossain's name occurring at the end of his compositions would have been heard and re-heard. People would have called him Hossain the saint, and they would have flocked to Ketupur to light a reverential candle at his grave-side."[29]

In any case, the fact that we find certain names in the ballads is not so important, after all. I doubt whether there are still many adherents of the production theory of folk-literature ; after all every folk-poem must have had some author originally, and it is not so much important whether his name has been preserved or not. To prevent any controversy, however, I shall exclude from my analysis the compositions by Chandrāvatī who is the only one of our poets in connection with whom doubts could arise as to whether she should be considered a folk-poet or not. Besides, her *Rāmāyaṇ*, the torso of which was included by D. C. Sen in the *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, is no real ballad and, moreover, is a traditional subject, so that I think it advisable not to include it in the same category as the other folk-ballads.

In full accordance with many folklorists I believe that more important than the problematic question of the authorship of folk-poetry are two other points, namely, whether the compositions in question were preserved for more than one generation through oral tradition, and whether they use in their work typical idioms, phrases and figures of speech used by simple people. Naturally even here, one could object that our ballads were not sung by anybody, but by certain singers or groups of singers who had, so to speak, a monopoly of certain compositions. On the other hand, however, there are variants showing more 'schools' or 'recensions' of the same ballad. And their stock of similes and figures of speech, which will be analyzed in detail later on, are really of pure folk character.

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[29] English translation by Hirendranath Mukherjee. Published by Kutub, Bombay, 1948, p. 65.

It must be stressed that in India—and most probably in other Asiatic countries, too—we cannot blindly apply results gained by folklorists studying the folk-literature of European nations. Obviously there are considerable differences between the folk-lore of Europe and that of different Asiatic countries. I do not think, however, that these differences are most significant, as far as the very character of the folk-literature is concerned; after all, regardless of differences resulting from what are called psychological peculiarities and, above all, the peculiarities of economic and social development of various nations, we find everywhere in the world basically the same categories of folk-literature, such as fairy-tales, religious songs, mythologies, love poetry, work songs, didactic poetry, heroic tales and ballads, etc. But what seems to be far more important is the mutual relation between the art literature and the folk-literature in Europe, on the one hand, and that existing in India, on the other.

Undoubtedly, seen from the point of view of their development, the folk-literature is much older than a country's art literature. We can say that the art literature was, in a way, separated off from the large sphere of folk-poetry, gaining gradually more and more ground until, at last, it succeeded in superseding or, rather, displacing to a great extent the folk-literature in the life of the people. Generally spoken, this process was relatively rapid in Europe. Leaving out of consideration the literatures of ancient Greece and Rome, which have no direct continuations, the individual European literatures are very young, compared with the literature of India or

China; but nowadays, folk-poetry is more or less dead in Europe, its remnants being rather artificially preserved. In spite of earnest efforts to help these remnants not only to live on, but to start a further development, for instance, in the socialist countries of Europe, the results are quite negligible and unsatisfactory, proving the actual decay of folk-literature as such. And it is only natural, I think, because folk-literature as such has lost its *raison d'être*, having been replaced, in all its previous functions, by something else: in its utilitarian tasks by general education, in its aesthetic functions by art literature and in its efforts to be a means of public amusement, by all those manifold means of entertainment and recreation offered by a civilized country.

Not so in India. Though, generally speaking, the art literature arose here earlier than in Europe and the immense bulk of the art literature, in Sanskrit, Prakrits, Pali and Tamil, many times exceeds the total of European literature in the first millennium A.D., the folk-literature has not been displaced by an art literature to this day. But why is it so? I do not think that it can be explained by the mere fact that, for long centuries, literature was written, first of all, in Sanskrit which was not understood by the masses; after all, the beginnings of the so-called Modern Indian literatures—Bengali, Marathi, Panjabi, etc.—are earlier than the majority of European literatures, not to mention that Tamil has been a literary language for at least two millenniums. Also the frequently mentioned illiteracy of the Indian people will hardly suffice as an explanation; there were periods, during the individual 'golden ages' of ancient and mediaeval India, when the general level of literacy was probably higher than in Europe of pre-modern times.

But there is one respect in which the art literature was not able, in my opinion, to provide a substitute for folk-literature in India. It was the religiosity of art literature, the firm grip which religion exercised over literature for long centuries and which, as a matter of fact, far from slackening in the course of times, has rather been strengthened, especially since the beginning of our millennium.

Undoubtedly it was due to the peculiar character of Hinduism. Its Indian followers are certainly right in claiming that, from the purely religious point of view, it is more tolerant and flexible in its principles than any other religion in the world has ever been. On the other hand, however, as if to make up for it, Hinduism bound the private as well as social life of its members down to very minute details, especially after its renaissance, when the caste system became more rigid. Nor did literature escape its all-pervading influence; though we do not find any such limitations in Indian poetics, practically all works of literature, with the one exception of court-poetry, had to be composed on a religious theme or, at least, to be given an external religious garb.[30]

This is particularly true of Bengali literature. When following its development from the old *charyā-padas* to Bhāratchandra and leaving out of consideration its Muslim section, we hardly find any works in which this religious garb is not present. Heroes have to become gods and men and women must join their company to be able to enter the classical literature; and human feelings must be experienced by gods, too, or, at least, connected with gods, if the poet is to interpret

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[30] By the way, a very similar situation is to be found in the fine arts, in which, too, non-religious subjects and creations are to be met with very rarely in the classical Hindu domain, whereas in folk-arts, secular elements are much stronger and more frequent.

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them. Behulā's love for Lakhindar must be protected by gods and Kṛishṇa's love for Rādhā can be depicted in such rich tones only because he is a god. It matters not that, under a divine exterior, the poets discover a purely human heart, with all its sentiments, faults and weakness. The poets singing of his love sometimes cross the border-line of obscenity; but they never replace the god Kṛishṇa by a human being, which seems to indicate that these elements of religiosity were considered a *conditio sine qua non*.

We certainly cannot say that folk-literature has been able to retain its autonomy in full and disregard completely conventions created by its art sister; as I saw in East Pakistan, even nowadays songs about human love are often forbidden to be sung within the walls of the village, whereas songs about the love of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa are sung as wedding songs (*Meyelī gān*), even by Muslim women. But the folk-literature had a great advantage. It never claimed any official recognition, it was never written on palm-leaves to be kept as objects of sacrifice, it never asked for a ruler's protection and support, its only judge being the people and its only criterium public opinion and taste. And it would be simply foolish to suppose that men ceased to be human because they were Hindus.

It is true that these 'religious' limitations did not go further than to postulate that every work of literature must be given such a form or contents as would enable it to be ranked as religious in the abovementioned sense of the word; the poets were not hindered in any way, from making full use of their human experience, from introducing realistic detail, or even from providing gods with human psychology, characters and qualities. Śiva of the old Bengali *Maṅgal-kāvyas* and Kṛishṇa of the mediaeval Vishnuist poetry are typical testimonies to this fact. But limitations did exist here and I believe that they were even felt by the people as such.

In the 19th century, then, a modern literature arose in Bengal, as everywhere in India, secular in its character and new in its contents. But as is well known, this literature was not created on the foundations of the domestic folk-tradition, but rather after patterns coming to India from outside. One of its characteristic features was that this literature had very little regard, for a long time, for the country people and the lower strata of society and had also, naturally, very little attraction for them. And thus, as said above, the classical literature was replaced, in some of its functions, in the lower classes by what we called popular literature, the poetry of *kabiwālās*, and the folk-literature continued to fulfil its old tasks, none of its rivals being strong enough to displace it in the life of the people.

As for the mutual relation between Bengali art literature and folk-poetry, there are many facts indicating a very active mutual influence of one on the other. On the one hand, we have mentioned already how the folk-literature supplied the classical poetry with both subjects and inspiration; on the other hand, the influence of classical poetry on the Bengali folk-songs is beyond any doubt. But if we are to answer the question as to how far this influence has gone, especially in the sphere of poetic means, our knowledge will prove to be rather vague. It is because very little research has been done so far in this respect; we have, for instance, no detailed analysis either as regards the poetic similes, metaphors, etc. of the classical Bengali poetry, or of the folk-songs. We shall try to fill this gap, in the latter field, in the last chapter of the present study.

II. THEMES AND COMPOSITION

Let us now take each ballad in turn and analyze them as regards their themes and art of composition. As said above, we shall confine our attention to the ballads from Mymensingh, but even here it will be advisable to leave out three of the edited texts: Chandrāvatī's *Rāmāyaṇ* for the reasons mentioned above, the story of *Kenārām the Robber*, as it is no true ballad and, besides, is said to have been composed by Chandrāvatī, and *Gopinī Kīrtan* which is a version of the Rādhā-Krishṇa legend. The ballads composed in prosometric form will be dealt with at the end of this chapter separately.

1. "Mahuyā". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, 1.2., pp. 3-42. 790 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De in some villages of Eastern Mymensingh and sent to D. C. Sen, on the 9th March, 1921.

The ballad of Mahuyā, the beautiful foster-daughter of the Gypsies, and young Zamindar Naderchānd, is, as regards its plot, one of the most attractive examples of the folk-epics of Mymensingh. It has a few obviously corrupted places and lacunas, but they cannot be many. Tradition ascribes the authorship of the ballad to the Namaśudra poet, Dvija Kānāi, but he is—unlike the majority of folk-authors of other ballads—nowhere mentioned in any of the colophons.

Contents: Mahuyā, the daughter of a Brahmin from Kānchanpur, was stolen and kidnapped, as a six-month-old baby, by Homrā, the chief of a Gypsy band. Mahuyā grows up into a beautiful girl and her 'father' Homrā has taught her the arts which are the means of livelihood of the whole band-singing, dancing and rope-walking. Present at one of their performances is Naderchānd, the son of the Zamindar from Bāmankāndā. Young Naderchānd at once falls in love with Mahuyā and she reciprocates his feelings. They meet at night, at the village *ghāt*, both of them full of tender feelings, but also aware of the fact that they can never meet in the society which places insurmountable obstacles in the way of their union. Homrā who has discovered their secret knows that, too, and afraid of possible consequences, makes his whole band leave the village in the same night. Mahuyā has no choice but to go with them and she asks Naderchānd to follow her into the wild northern mountains, where no social ostracism would stand in the way of their love. Naderchānd leaves his home and, for a full year, he wanders from place to place in search of his beloved. He finds her, at last, in the mountain camp of the Gypsies. Mahuyā, sick with vain desire, recovers at once, but a new obstacle arises between them—Homrā, who does not want to give up his 'daughter'. He sends Mahuyā to kill Naderchānd sleeping outside on the bank of the river. Mahuyā pretends to obey his order, but she does not kill her lover. Instead, both of them decide to run away and they manage to escape, for the moment, the wrath of the revengeful Gypsy. They reach the bank of the river and ask a merchant to help them cross the stream. But the merchant falls in love with the beautiful girl, throws Naderchānd into the waves, to get rid of his rival, and begs Mahuyā to become his wife. The girl poisons the merchant and his boatmen with poisoned betel, smashes a hole in the bottom of the ship and jumps out to find her beloved again. After hours of despair she finds him, lying more dead than alive in a deserted temple whither he has been brought by a hermit. She entreats the hermit to revive Naderchānd with healing herbs, but his rescuer also wants now to kill young Zamindar and win Mahuyā for himself. The brave girl carries her lover away, on her own shoulders, and after he recoveres fully, their love at last finds a happy refuge in the forests. But their happiness does not last long. One day Mahuyā hears the well-known tones of a flute; it is played by her friend Pālaṅka, another Gypsy-girl, who thus warns her of approaching danger. At the last moment, Mahuyā reveals what she knows of her real parents and bids farewell to her lover, as she knows that the days of their happiness are over. Homrā appears with his band, asks Mahuyā to follow him again, and when she refuses, hands her a poisoned knife to kill Naderchānd. Mahuyā prefers to kill herself and she is buried in one grave with her lover. The unhappy Homrā leaves his band and only Pālaṅka remains on the grave to weep over the tragic love and end of her friend.

The mere comparison of the rich contents with the number of verses shows that, in this ballad, the epic element predominates over the lyrical one, that the attractive and broadly developed action is the main object of the song. It is good example of the importance which epic folk-poetry attributes to action. Within a relatively small space, so much action is condensed that there remains little space for other elements—though they are not altogether lacking, either. The author does not stop to characterize the heroes and figures of his ballad in more detail, but leaves it to the imagination of his listeners to create a picture of them. A physical description is given only of the main heroine of the ballad, Mahuyā; but even here we learn only the most essential things, namely, that she is beautiful, that the *champā* flowers blossom on her cheeks (I.31), [31] that she has eyes like stars (I.32), hair reaching down to feet (I.30) and that she shines like a jewel from the snake's head (I.26) or like pure gold in a dark room (I.29). Not a single word of description has our folk-poet for Homrā, his brother Māinkā, the Gypsy-girl Pālaṅka and the merchant. As for Naderchānd, who is such an important figure in our ballad, we are only told that "he shines among men like the moon among stars" (III.2), the hermit is only said to have his hair tied up and his beard long (XX.23), and these are all the physical descriptions to be found in the whole ballad. The characters of the individual figures, then, derive from the roles which the folk-poet gives them in his story. The central pair, Mahuyā and Naderchānd, are, of course, positive in every respect and with no reservation; but still, Naderchānd represents the weaker element, more passive and attracting the listener's sympathies in a lesser degree. What is, however, really striking is the way in which the folk-author abstains from passing any moral judgement upon Homrā, who, as a matter of fact, kills the beautiful young love—he neither criticizes him nor tries to find any justification for his actions or behaviour. This, of course, holds of all the poet's relations to the characters in his composition. He never criticizes them, he does not condemn them, he neither appraises nor blames. His pose is that of an *unconcerned narrator* of other people's doings and adventures, undoubtedly sympathizing with the young couple who broke the ties of convention and of caste and social order, undoubtedly admiring the beautiful and brave girl and touched deeply by her tragic end, but not commenting in any way on her conduct or the deeds of other persons.

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[31] For the sake of quotation, I had to provide each verse with a number, counting each canto separately; the first number (in Roman numerals) refers to the number of the canto, according to Sen's edition, the second to the number of the respective verse.

The only real *hero* of the ballad, in the proper sense of the word, is Mahuyā, the girl. She is *beautiful*, first of all—that is what she has in common with the heroines of other ballads, as well as of the classical stories of ancient Indian (and not only Indian) literature. She is *brave*, not losing hope, though she is depressed after the departure of the Gypsies from Bāmankāndā, or after the presumed death of Naderchānd in the river; even unavoidable death she faces with courage and with no lamentation. She is also *clever* and *resourceful*, is able to find a way out of every difficulty and a solution to every situation. Though in love with Naderchānd, she is *chaste* and able to reply to his too daring words, at their first meeting at the village *ghāt*. And she is *faithful* towards her lover and does not leave him, though after his departure from home, he has become a nobody and an outcaste—she does not betray him for the sake of the merchant's wealth or at the insistence of the hermit. All this makes her a true *ideal* of a woman. On the other hand, however, she does not represent any superhuman ideal of womanhood of the type with which we not infrequently meet in classical Indian poetry. Her pure character and the strength of her love, which neither traditional morality, religious prejudice nor social convention can weaken, makes her so deeply human that she can and must become an ideal. It is, I hope, unnecessary to remind the reader how different this ideal is from that of the art literature of pre-modern

Bengal. Can we ask for a better proof of the folk-origin of this ballad?

Naderchānd prefers love to his caste, he leaves his home and wealth consciously and voluntarily. With this, however, he exhausts all his claim to 'heroship'. The author concentrated too many ideal features in Mahuyā and raised her too high above her surroundings, to be able to save enough of the listeners' sympathies for another character in his story. It is apparent also from the external description of individual figures which we have already mentioned; and it comes out particularly clearly in the role the poet gave to the rest of the cast: Naderchānd is a devoted lover of Mahuyā, Pālaṅka is a true friend of the same Mahuyā. All these and other figures are centred around Mahuyā and depicted in their relation to her. Even the negative characters in the ballad (the merchant, the hermit) are nothing but a foil for Mahuyā's nobility.

The whole ballad is composed in a simple, melodic *payār*, with assonances and one- and two-syllabic rhymes. When reading the verses, we cannot avoid feeling a certain crudeness, as compared with the verses of classical Bengali epics. The form is definitely not the main point of this, nor, indeed, of any of the ballads.

This does not mean, of course, that the ballad is imperfect in any way, as regards composition or poetic images. The poet concentrates his main attention on the action itself as its chief point and does not try to squeeze a larger number of metaphors and similes into it; but with undeniable mastery, perfected by generations of traditional bards, he knows how to insert an apt metaphor or simile in the most suitable places—in the description of the beauty of his heroine, in a love-dialogue, etc. Here he did not hesitate to use not only verses, but even whole portions created by his predecessors and liked by the audience, *e.g.* the dialogue concluding the 5th canto, which you may frequently come across, even today, when collecting folk-poetry in Eastern Bengal.[32] The way in which the folk-poet finds with unerring instinct the most suitable place for a lyrical poetic image can be illustrated by one example : In the 13th canto, he describes the long wandering of Naderchānd in search of Mahuyā; the song, relatively simple in its diction, is finished with abrupt, but very impressive words expressing the successful conclusion to Naderchānd's journey : "In Agrahāyaṇ, when it was already beginning to turn cold, on the banks of Kansāi/ Naderchānd found the beautiful Mahuyā.//As when a snake finds a jewel, the thirsty finds water,/the bee crazy to drink the honey of the lotus-flower."[33]

These lyrical points form the most characteristic feature of the ballad and, I do not hesitate to say, its most valuable artistic achievement. We could call it *the art of poetic abbreviation.* To explain it in a better way, let us survey the structure of the ballad, the lay-out presentation of the subject, the sequence of the action and the relation between the epic and the lyrical elements.

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[32] *Cf. Hārāmaṇi*, Vol. I, pp. 126-7; Raośan Izdani, *Momenśāhīr lok-sāhitya*, p. 4, etc.

[33] I cannot use, in my quotations, the English translation of the ballads by D. C. Sen. However great its merit may have been in presenting the ballads to non-Bengali readers, it must be said that this translation does not faithfully reproduce the Bengali text. There are frequent omissions (which would not matter so much), but there are also many insertions of the character of inner explanations invented by the translator; and moreover, D. C. Sen did not even try to interpret the folk-style of the original, its syntactical peculiarities, economy of expression, etc., shortly all that we feel obliged to stress in our study as the most characteristic features of the ballads.

There are no lyrical portions of any considerable length in the ballad, though its story offers more than one opportunity for nature descriptions and similar insertions. The 1st canto starts with six verses forming a kind of topographic as well as atmospheric introduction : the Garo mountains, distant and deserted, without inhabitants, without sun and light—the haunt only of wild animals and Gypsies. Then a condensed narration follows, interrupted by a short description of Mahuyā's beauty and finishing with a couplet summarizing the point of the first canto : "When the Gypsy wife of Homrā got the beautiful girl/she thought out a name for her—Mahuyā the Beautiful." And the action hurries on. Even the meeting of the future lovers, Naderchānd and Mahuyā, does not require a larger number of verses for its reporting, with all its consequences : "When the Gypsy girl moved on the bamboo/Naderchānd, who had been sitting, stood up.//And when she started to dance on the rope/Naderchānd cried out : Don't let her fall and die!" What a brief and effective expression of the young man's love is compressed into this exclamation! And the response of the girl is in the same shorthand, when she says to herself : "I would like to win your heart." We must remember long portions devoted to dreary descriptions and circumlocutions of lovers' feelings in the classical Indian literature, to evaluate fully this conciseness of expression. Even when confessing her love to her friend and confidante Pālaṅka, Mahuyā does not use many words. Then a short lyrical introduction to the next epic action follows : "Phālgun passed, Chaitra comes/the golden cuckoos sing sitting on every tree.//Paddy with coloured ears ripens in the fields" and immediately we are in the midst of the next action : "At midnight, Naderchānd woke up."

Naderchānd plays his flute to bring Mahuyā, in the calmness of night, to the *ghāt*, "like a *pāpiyā* calling again and again in the sky ". Then the happy meeting of the lovers follows, Mahuyā's hesitation, Homrā's spying. In the 11th canto, after the departure of the Gypsies, Naderchānd's despair is described, introduced by a short couplet : " The house lies broken, there is no straw on the roof/the bird flies away leaving the cage empty." And in this way, we could go on in this analysis to the end of the ballad, to that wonderfully abrupt, but strongly expressive couplet concluding the whole story : " Mother Earth is drenched by the tears of Pālankā the friend/This is the end of Naderchānd's story."

Why have we devoted so much space to this peculiar feature of the ballad? First of all, because it is in direct contrast to the verbosity of the classical epic literature. Especially in Sanskrit epics, we find long and sometimes long-winded descriptions of figures and natural scenery, insertions of moralistic or religio-philosophical treatises and reflections, etc. Of course, it is impossible to confront these two poetic poles and ask which is the better. But a modern reader will probably be more attracted by the artistic method of the Bengali folk-poet who tries, above all, to avoid being tiresome and literally hastens towards the end of his story, which is marked by that peculiar brevity which can be characterized as *the shortest connection of the epical with the lyrical element.*

The folk-poet thinks and creates within the frame of individual *payār*-couplets. It is no discovery to state that this couplet forms a natural building unit, sufficient to express an idea, an element of action or a poetic image. The author of our ballad strings his couplets together, not always trying to make the connection between them fluent; the result is often a new element of surprise, strengthening the interest of the listeners. Let us illustrate it by the translation of the introductory verses of the 18th canto:

"Listen, now, what happened then./ The merchant thought to himself how to get the girl.//He became crazy when seeing the girl's beauty/he called his boatmen and took their advice.//The boat of the merchant sails on the waves./ Naderchānd floats in the water—how could it happen?//Black waves swirl and disappear in the stream/Naderchānd is drowning in the whirl of the waves.//"

This short portion is a drama in itself, with a structure of its own in which the individual couplets, with their natural *caesura*, form very distinct building units. There is the introductory verse containing the neutral formula of the narrator who never forgets his bardic position, and the second verse complementing it by characterizing very shortly the atmosphere and the tension; then a strongly marked *caesura* followed by the catastrophe. No description how Naderchānd was attacked and defeated by the boatmen, no long sentences on the battle—just the surprising outcome in the form of two parallel couplets, with the intensifying, oppressive scenery of the wild river-stream depicted in a few well-chosen words.

We have used the word *surprise* already and it is necessary to repeat and stress it as much as possible. For this is the element with which the poet operates throughout all his ballad. Even where the listener can anticipate, after a previous hint, what will follow, the poet knows how to surprise him in another way—by an element of form, by his way of expression. And it is only natural, if we keep in mind that these ballads were composed to be listened to, to be enjoyed by an audience awaiting some interesting narrative.

In his introductory notes to the Bengali edition as well as English translation of the ballads, D. C. Sen has much to say about various aspects of these compositions. Unfortunately, he very rarely quotes the source of his information. Thus he mentions, in connection with *Mahuyā*, the word *drama* or *melodrama* many times, providing even the title of the Bengali text with a subtitle *prāchīn pallīnāṭikā* (old village-drama). I heard from different people in Mymensingh that there have been staged various versions of the story very similar to that of *Mahuyā*, mostly in the form of a traditional *yātrā*; but this is not a sufficient reason to call our ballad a drama. In the text, as it was edited, there are lots of formulas introducing the dialogues and forming inseperable parts of the individual verses. On the other hand, however, there are also dialogues in which the listener has to consider who is the speaker, which may be the reason why some modern interpreters choose the form of a stage-dialogue.

Before concluding our short analysis of this ballad, it is necessary to return once more to the question of its authenticity, for it was just this ballad which was attacked most frequently by the opponents of the Mymensingh ballads. As for its romantic story and tragic end, enough was said in the first chapter of the present study. It is also interesting to note that we have a very similar story where we would hardly expect to find it—in the poetry of the great Russian poet A. S. Pushkin; it is his epic poem 'Tsigane',[34] the story of the love of a Gypsy-girl and a non-Gypsy, also with a tragic end. Remembering how often Pushkin took his themes from folklore, we can suppose the existence of such a motif in the folk-poetry and tales of the Gypsies in India as well as outside. I must mention also the fact that the variant quoted by Raośan Izdani[35] has the same end and another variant, collected and edited by Purnachandra Bhattacharya[36] does not differ, in this respect, from *Mahuyā*.

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[34] I am grateful to my friend Mr. Animesh Pal, M.A., for directing my attention to this parallel.

More than once, the very names of Mahuyā and Homrā were suspect, especially the former which is the name of a tree said to be unknown in Mymensingh; this name really does not appear in other versions of the story, *Mahuyā* being called, most frequently, simply '*bādyānī* (the Gypsy-girl)'.[37] Either the collector or the editor could easily have changed, for some undisclosed reason, the name of the heroine; it occurs only once at the end of the verse (XXIII, 28), and here in the accusative form *Mahuyāre* in which only the acc. ending -re is rhymed with the end word of the preceding verse. But I think it is not necessary to suppose any change having been carried out here. If the name Mahuyā sounds foreign in the ears of the Mymensingh people, could it not have been chosen by the poet, just because of its "exotic" flavour, for a girl of exceptional beauty and moreover of Brahmin origin, given to the girl by a Gypsy woman?

The editor did, however, make some changes in the text which he obtained from the collector. He himself said it in the Preface to the English translation:

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[35] *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-15.

[36] *Cf.* Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Bānglār lok-sāhitya*, ed. cit., p. 335.

[37] It is interesting, however, that the name Mahuyā appears once also in the version reproduced by Raośan Izdani (p. 113).

'As I have already said, the shape in which Chandra Kumar sent me his collection was far from satisfactory. . . I had to take great pains to rearrange the poem by a close and careful study of the text. The incongruities of the original compilation have, I hope, now been almost entirely removed.''[38] But besides these reasonable changes, there is no reason to suppose that either the editor or the collector went any farther.

2. " Maluyā ". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, 1.2., pp. 45-100. 1281 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De in various villages of Mymensingh and sent to the editor on the 3rd October, 1921.

The ballad of the beautiful Maluyā is one of the longest folk-compositions from Mymensingh. The name of its author is not known. D. C. Sen thinks that it is because of the anti-Muslim character of the ballad, the author of which could lay himself open to persecution by the Muslim rulers.

As for its contents, the ballad has two parts ; the first centres around Chānd Binod and the second has Maluyā for its heroine. It is this second part which, like so many other ballads of the same collection, glorifies a woman and establishes an ideal of womanhood.

Contents : The young farmer Chānd Binod, living with his mother, is obliged to sell all his small property, after a bad year, and look for other sources of income. Being a skilful hunter of falcons, he decides to earn some money by hunting. His journey comes to its end in the village of Ārāliyā, where he falls asleep, one afternoon, at the *ghāt*. Here he is discovered by Maluyā, the daughter of the rich farmer Hīrādhar and sister of five brothers, who falls in love with Chānd, who is equally enchanted by her beauty. Both of them meet again, next day, and Chānd Binod comes as a guest to Hīrādhar's house. Though superior to Hīrādhar by caste, Chānd knows that he has no chance to win the daughter of the rich man. He is right, the match-maker sent by Chānd's mother is turned away, as many others before him, because Hīrādhar hopes for a better bridegroom for his only daughter. Chānd leaves his home to earn money by hunting, and when he returns a rich man, Hīrādhar himself sends his proposal. This first part of the ballad concludes with a long description of Chānd's marriage to Maluyā and their return to the house of Chānd. The happiness of the young couple does not last long. Maluyā, when bathing at the village *ghāt*, is seen by a wicked Kazi, who tries to seduce her. When he is rejected, he orders Chānd to pay an enormous marriage tax (*nāzār marechha*), which costs the young man all his property. Distressed by the sufferings of his beloved wife and mother, Chānd secretly leaves his home to get rich again by hunting. He succeeds, indeed, but the Kazi takes his revenge. He tells the Dewan about the beautiful woman and orders Chānd to send her to the Dewan's palace. Chānd refuses, of course, and is to be executed. Maluyā sends a falcon with the message to her five brothers who hurry to Chānd's rescue ; but in the meantime, Maluyā is kidnapped by Kazi's men and brought to the palace of the Dewan. She finds her way out, however, pretending to keep a religious vow which forbids her to eat meals cooked by any hand than her own or to look upon any man. Thus she saves both her caste and her virtue. After three months, she induces the Dewan to execute the Kazi and go out on the river with her on a hunt. Chānd and Maluyā's brothers, informed by a letter which she has sent them, attack the Dewan and liberate Maluyā. After her return to Chānd's house, Maluyā is accused by her husband's relatives of having defiled her caste during the long stay in a Muslim house, and Chānd is asked to divorce her. Maluyā herself makes him do so, to save his position, and stays in Chānd's house as a mere servant. Once again, she is given an opportunity to show her devotedness; she helps to save her husband's life after he was bitten by a snake. But even this does not enable her to be accepted into the caste again. She sees that as long as she lives, Chānd will be the aim of constant attacks, and so she decides to take her life. In vain her relatives try to dissuade her from this decision, in vain the unhappy Chānd promises to abandon his caste because of her—she mounts a broken boat and dies in the waves.

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[38] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, Mymensingh, Vol. I, Part 1, *ed. cit.*, p. ii of the Preface to the ballad in question.

✓ Compared with Mahuyā, the story of Maluyā has not the same thrill of excitement, but it has many positive points of another kind. First of all, it is more realistic and typical in its selection of theme and episodes, being an eloquent accusation of the cruelty of the caste system, on the one hand, and the atrocities of the Muslim ruling class, on the other. In the former aspect, it is a direct continuation, in a way, of the Ramayana story, as far as Sita's trial after her rescue from Lanka is concerned. But where Sita was supported and helped by the gods to prove her unstained virtue/which cannot happen in the real life/, Maluyā has to die, unable to get rid of suspicions in any other way/which, I am afraid, could actually have happened/.

Thus we are fully justified here in speaking of a *tendency*, stressed by the fact that it is given in the form of a vivid and touching love-story.

No less severe is the criticism to which evils caused and tolerated by the representatives of the Muslim ruling class are subjected. Both the Kazi and the Dewan are treated without the least sympathy, being conglomerates of negative features and characteristics. The Kazi is very often given the stereotype epithet "dushman" (villain) and depicted as a cruel and reckless brute, lecherous and revengeful, not hesitating to misuse his power and position to achieve his unclean selfish ends or revenge. The Dewan, though our folk-poet is more reserved in his description, is nothing but a pleasure-seeker and a block-head who is easily deceived by the clever woman and outwitted by her brothers.

This, of course, does not result from any anti-Muslim feelings on the part of the folk-poet ; as rightly stressed by D. C. Sen, religious bias cannot be attributed to the folk-ballads from Eastern Bengal. It is only an expression of the opposition of poor Bengali people towards oppressors and tyrants.

It would be superfluous to quote once more the way in which the evil consequences of the Hindu caste system are treated, to support our opinion. It is sufficient to note at the beginning of the ballad the rather unusual importance given to the description of the poverty of Chānd Binod and other village people, to understand that the standpoint of our poet is that of a *social critic*, of a man concerned with the sufferings of the people to whom he himself belongs.

We have said that the author of *Mahuyā* adopts the standpoint of an unconcerned narrator, simply relating the life-story and adventures of other people. In the folk-author of *Maluyā*, he has his antipode, being something of a teacher and a critic, following a certain tendency in his work and drawing more general conclusions from his story. Whereas in *Mahuyā*, we have rarely, if at all, found any formulation having the character of a moral maxim or a more general judgment, they abound in *Maluyā;* and like the authors of other ballads who intentionally take them out of the body of the text and incorporate them in a colophon, the poet of *Maluyā* makes these maxims part of the story, of which they often provide the moral point.

There are still other differences between *Mahuyā* and *Maluyā* which could be noted ; for instance, the way of constructing and individual *payār* couplets, which, in *Maluyā*, are often more ingenious, from the aesthetical point of view (*e.g.* I, 59-60, III, 89-90, IX, 39-40, etc.). All these differences show us that the oral tradition has certainly not eliminated the individuality of different folk-poets, the author of *Maluyā* being, for instance, more akin to the art-poets. The same conclusion is hinted at by the fact that also in his poetics, the author of *Maluyā* is more refined, using, for instance, fewer epithets, but more similes and metaphors, especially in places with marked emotional stress.

As in *Mahuyā*, the only ballad character who is described in any detail is the heroine. But her description is divided into two parts ; once the listener sees her as if with Chānd Binod's eyes (III, 53-58), for the second time, with the eyes of the wicked Kazi (XII, 9-14) ; there is, however, no finer differentiation between these two descriptions.

As for its composition, we have said already that the ballad consists of two parts, at least, with a clear dividing line after the 11th canto. In this respect, if the majority of Mymensingh ballads remind us of short stories, *Maluyā* has more in common with a novel. The first part tells, against the background of the poverty of village people and their hard life, the story of the love and final happy union of the two young people, Chānd Binod being its real hero; the second, then, has the oppression by Muslim rulers as its chief motif and is an apotheosis of a great woman and her chastity and devotedness.

It is in this second part that Maluyā grows up into a real heroine and an ideal. This ideal is more "Indian", so to speak, as compared with Mahuyā, more traditional and more akin to the heroines of classical Indian poetry. She sacrifices herself for the sake of her husband, not seeking her own happiness, but exclusively his benefit, not fighting for her love, but for his well-being. In this respect, the author of *Maluyā* is a full-blooded Hindu and a successor of the centuries-long tradition of Hinduism.

3. "Chandrābatī". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, 1.2., pp. 103-18. 379 verses. No data about the place and time of collecting available.

This is a relatively short ballad, composed, according to the concluding colophon, by Nayān Chānd Ghosh. It centres around the story of the unhappy love of Chandrābatī, the daughter of Bansī Dās, a poet and Śiva's devoted follower; both of them are historical personalities, but information about them, especially about Chandrābatī, which have come down to us, are hopelessly mixed up with obvious legends and other folk fantasies.

Contents: Since her childhood, Chandrābatī has known Jayānanda from the neighbouring village who comes to help her to pick flowers for her father's sacrifice. They fall in love with each other, Jayānanda sends her a letter asking her to be his wife and his parents try to arrange the marriage through a matchmaker. Banśī Dās is a poor man, in spite of his high caste and poetic fame, and gladly accepts the offer. Preparations are being made for the marriage. With no introduction, the second part of the ballad confronts us with a radically changed situation: Jayānanda has fallen in love with a Muslim girl, married her and given up his religion, caste and Chandrābatī. She is deeply hurt and decides to devote the rest of her life to the god Śiva. Her father advises her to compose a Bengali Rāmāyaṇ. After some time, Jayānanda sends a letter asking for forgiveness and a meeting, even if it should be only a meeting to say farewell. Chandrābatī refuses to see him and when Jayānanda comes, she is in the temple in yogic meditation. In vain he entreats her to come out and see him for the last time. Her meditation over, she leaves the temple; there is a letter saying good-bye on the door and the dead body of the young man in the river. The ballad concludes with the following colophon: "Smiles and tears are like a dream, sings Nayān Chānd/it is difficult to communicate to others the sufferings of one's own heart."

The composition of the ballad shows certain peculiarities:

Both parts of the ballad have an energetic exposition, without any introduction, informing the listener of the individual persons or the situation; the poet confronts the listener with a fully developed conflict (in the first part, the love of the young couple, and the betrayal of Jayānanda in the second) and the necessary explanation comes later. Such a poetic procedure is uncommon in folk-poetry.

Another point which brings the ballad of *Chandrābatī* closer to art poetry, is the similes and metaphors; they are relatively numerous, considering the limited scope of the ballad, being concentrated in places with an emotional stress (IX. 3-30, XII. 22-37) and, above all, some of them have a certain classical colouring (*e.g.* "Clouds were glittering in a golden robe /and, in the morning, the sun appeared veiled in yellow", III, 1-2).

Also the author's knowledge of human psychology seems to be deeper than that of other folk-poets from Mymensingh; he certainly was no primitive type of poet!

Finally, we must note that, unlike the overwhelming majority of our ballads, religion here is far from being of secondary importance. Indeed, the motivation of the whole ballad can be looked upon as, in a sense, religious. What was the immediate impulse that led to the composition of this ballad? I think we can find the clue in the concluding verse of the 11th canto where Banśī Dās says to his daughter, shocked by Jayānanda's betrayal: "Serve the god Śiva and write a Rāmāyaṇ!" We know that Chandrābatī really wrote a Bengali Rāmāyaṇ; a torso of it was published by D. C. Sen in Volume IV of the *Pūrbabaṅgā-gītikā*. We know also, from the ballad itself, that this work was considered, in religious circles, to be a religious work.[illegible] From this point of view the whole ballad seems to be an effort to give an explanation to the anomaly—and an anomaly it

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[illegible] "In her leisure, the girl composes a Rāmāyaṇ / the reading of which purifies men from sin" (XII. 3-4).

certainly was—that a girl should create such a holy book. If we add to this the yogistic devotion of Chandrābatī to Śiva and the way his praises are sung (IV., VIII. 17-18, XII. 72-77, etc.), we are fully justified in seeing in the ballad a type of a religious work, which is rather an exception within the frame of the Mymensingh folk-epics.

This is, however, no reason to exclude it from folk-literature. The diction of the ballad, refrains, story-tellers' formulas, very free assonances, etc., all this shows that it is a folk-creation, or, what comes to the same thing, a work which has gone through a long oral tradition in which it has become assimilated to folk-epics.

The name of Nayān Chānd Ghosh given in the concluding colophon of the ballad is practically of no help or value. Even D. C. Sen said: "The present ballad was composed by the poet Nayan Chand Ghosh, whose name also occurs in a few colophons of the poem named 'Lila and Kanka'. The style of the present song is full of simple charm, and offers a contrast to the classical and somewhat pedantic language adopted by the poet in the other poem which he wrote in conjunction with Raghusuta and other poets. . ." [40] D. C. Sen is undoubtedly right and a careful comparison of the two ballads only confirms his judgement.

4. " Kamalā ". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, I.2., pp. 121-70. 1184 + 24 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De in Kendua and forwarded on the 4th July, 1921.

The ballad of *Kamalā* was composed, as we learn from colophons, by a certain Dvijā Iśān about whom no other information is available. The ballad is rather long, but not because of the richness of its contents, which are rather simple.

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[40] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, Mymensingh, I. 1, ed. cit., p. 84.

Contents : Mānik Chākladār is a rich and happy man. He lives in prosperity and has a son and a beautiful daughter Kamalā. Her exceptional beauty kindles an ardent passion in Mānik's agent, Nidān, who sends her a love-letter through an old milk-woman. In spite of all her cleverness, the milk-woman is turned out and beaten by Kamalā ; Nidān tries another way—he tells Mānik's Zamindar that Mānik has found a treasure in a field belonging to the Zamindar, but kept it for himself. Mānik, of course, denies the accusation and is imprisoned. To get rid of Mānik's son, too, Nidān sends him to intercede for his father with the Zamindar, and he is also imprisoned. Then Nidān tries to win Kamalā by promises and threats. But the girl prefers to leave her home, along with the mother, and take shelter at the house of her uncle, who is abroad. The wicked Nidān writes him a letter stating that Kamalā has defiled her caste and that the Zamindar will punish everybody who tries to protect her. The uncle asks his wife to turn Kamalā out, the aunt lets the girl read the letter and Kamalā immediately leaves their house, in the middle of night. Wandering in the jungle, she meets an old herdsman who takes her for an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmī and offers her shelter in his cottage. Some days later, by a happy coincidence, the Zamindar's son comes here, falls in love with Kamalā and takes her to his father's place with the intention of marrying her. She does not reveal her secret to him and waits for an opportune moment. One day she learns that her father and brother are to be sacrificed to the goddess Kālī. Then she makes her fiancé bring all the persons who played any part in her sufferings and, before the Zamindar's court, she retells, in the form of a long *Bāromāsī*, the whole story of Nidān's intrigues. After the witnesses confirm her words, the Zamindar orders Mānik and his son to be released and the wicked Nidān to be executed, instead of them. After that, Kamalā's marriage with the young Zamindar is celebrated.

The mere comparison of this relatively simple plot with the length of the ballad shows that its author belonged to the type of poet who is not afraid of verbosity. Especially he indulges in protracted dialogues and individual scenes. The poet thereby succeeds in characterizing the heroes of his ballad, in entertaining his audience and in working up the tension. From this point of view, the most typical is the scene in which the milk-woman brings Kamalā Nidān's love-letter (canto V). Both the women—the milk-woman following her wicked intentions and Kamalā for her entertainment—think out a funny story of the girl's 'godly husband', from her previous birth, and their characters are depicted in their respective dialogues with expressive plasticity—that of the merry and playful Kamalā as well as that of the shrewd and unscrupulous milk-woman.

The length of the ballad is due, above all, to Kamalā's testimony at the Zamindar's court, which is nothing but a repetition of the previous story in nearly 300 verses. Though there are a few discrepancies of fact between the two 'versions' of the story, we can hardly believe the ballad to be a conglomeration of two originally independent songs, or the second 'version' to be a later addition. A detailed analysis of the whole ballad shows that it is one homogeneous whole and that repetition is here a characteristic feature of Dvijā Iśān's poetry.

There is also a strong predilection for *hyperbole*, which is common to both parts of the ballad. We come across it, of course, in other ballads, too, but never in such concentration.

We can follow it in the situations and in the poetic images. By the hyperbole of situation, I mean here the poet's tendency to carry the situation to its limits, either comic or tragic. In illustration, we can again quote the 5th canto, the dialogue between Kamalā and the milk-woman mentioned above. The milk-woman starts the discussion by asking the simple question why Kamalā is not yet married. The girl, who loves to poke fun, replies with a story she makes up of a previous incarnation in which she was the wife of Madan, the god of love—and how could she betray him now by marrying an ordinary man? The milk-woman continues in the same vein : She says that the other day, when taking curd-cheese to the heaven (she goes into details stating how many stairs there are on the way to the heaven, etc.), she met Madan who is sick for love of Kamalā and is sending her a letter ; then the milk-woman hands her Nidān's amorous letter. Kamalā realizes that she has become a victim of her own joke, but continues the conversation, asking the milk-woman to describe Madan for her ; whereupon the old procuress describes Nidān. As if wanting to reward the woman, Kamalā prolongs the play for a while, but then she beats her without mercy. Even this beating is depicted in a somewhat exaggerated way and with drastic details.

In the author's poetics, the hyperbole is to be found no less often. The poetic image is a means revealing, both in its contents and form, much that is characteristic of the poet's knowledge, predilections, sensitivity, technical skill, etc. In the case of folk-poetry, in which similes and metaphors are stereotype and much less individual, the selection of images used most frequently is significant. Thus Dvijā Iśān obviously prefers metaphoric exaggerations. In his ballad, "the girl is bent forward by the weight of youth" (IV. 3); seeing her sufferings, "the leaves of the trees fall" (V. 14); "the moon hopes to leave the sky" because of her beauty (V. 34); "the *kokil* is shamed by her voice" (V. 35); the milk-woman "nearly bursts her sides laughing" (V. 114); "in the tears of the herdsman, the thatched cow-shed floats" (XII. 55); "animals and birds weep at Kamalā's lamentations" (XIV. 6); "the earth is flooded by the tears of the mother" (XV. 134); the preparations for the wedding are so splendid that seeing them, "the moon hid in the darkness" (XVII. 16); etc. In this way, the poet achieves his artistic goal—a considerable expressivity and strong impression, in which the lyrical finesse of other poets is replaced by a kind of robust approach to reality.

The ballad has an introduction (*ārambhaṇ*), which evidently was not composed by the author of the ballad, but by a singer. In it the whole poem is repeatedly referred to as a *Bāromāsī*. Besides, there is a short *Kamalār Svagata Sangīt* (Kamalā's Soliloquy Song) attached to the ballad, which, according to the editor, must have once formed a part of another version. It does actually differ from the ballad in diction and metre, so that we can fully agree with D. C. Sen; and it is significant that even this short song has a colophon, containing the name of Dvijā Iśān.

Another interesting point connected with *Kamalā* is the fact that Chandrakumār De collected it 'from 3 or 4 women', probably not professional singers, though the editor does not say so in so many words.[41]

We cannot overlook the fact that the whole ballad represents a purely Hindu composition insofar as no Muslim figures in it. And it is this ballad which, unlike the majoriy of the others, has a happy-end. If we are right in attributing a certain romantic colouring of the ballads and their tragic ends to the influence of Muslim Bengali literature, as we suggested in the first chapter of the present study, then we can see in *Kamalā* a fruit of Hindu folk-tradition, uninfluenced, in this case, by foreign elements.

5. "Dewān Bhābnā". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, I. 2., pp. 173-91. 378 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De in the vicinity of Kendua, in the Netrakonā subdivision, and forwarded in September, 1922.

This ballad is relatively short, due not only to the simplicity of the story, but also to the author's art of condensation.

Contents : The heroine of the ballad is Sunāi whose father died, leaving his wife and daughter in poverty. She is beautiful, even at the age of ten, and to secure a good bridegroom for her, the mother goes to live with her at the house of her brother Bhātuk, a village Brahmin. One day the girl meets Mādhab, the son of a rich Zamindar, at the *ghāt*. They fall in love with each other, exchange love-letters carried by Sunāi's friend Sallā and everything points to an early, happy marriage. But Sunāi is also seen by the wicked Bāghrā, a spy of the Muslim Dewān Bhābnā, who is thus informed about the beautiful girl. Prompted by the Dewan, Bāghrā promises the poor Brahmin Bhātuk a rich reward and plans with him the abduction of Sunāi. She gets wind of it, however, and sends a message to Mādhab asking him to take her away from the uncle's house as quickly as possible. Then, when going to fetch water, she is abducted by the Dewan's men; but their boat is seen by Mādhab, who defeats the abductors and takes Sunāi with him to marry her. The Dewan takes his revenge; he imprisons Mādhab's father and lets him go only after Mādhab gives himself up. The father-in-law tells Sunāi that she could rescue her husband by offering herself to the Dewan. She obeys, goes to the palace, makes the Dewan give Mādhab his freedom, but then commits suicide by taking poison.

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[41] From the editor's Preface to *Maluyā*, we learn that also professional women-singers sang our ballads (*ibid*., p. 34).

D. C. Sen thinks the ballad to be based on an actual event. Ten miles from Netrakonā, Mymensingh, there is a marsh called *Bāghrār hāor*, named, according to the local tradition, after a certain Dewan's spy, who helped his master to have Hindu girls abducted for his harem. There is no reason to doubt that something very similar could have happened in real life.

As for its tendency, the ballad is a true people's creation. It is a sharp accusation of the vile, wicked Dewan and his spy. At the same time, however, it also criticizes the Brahmin Bhātuk, who sacrifices his own niece for the sake of a rich reward. Thus it is clear that the ballad does not attack the Dewan for religious reasons. In other respects, too, the ballad is completely free of any religious implications. It is simple, human justice which is the only aim of the ballad.

The main characteristic of this ballad is its intimate *lyricism*, its lyrical elements predominating, in a *qualitative* way, over the epic. It is apparent in the very construction of the composition. In his edition, D. C. Sen noted many lacunas; without seeing the collector's manuscript, we cannot decide whether they are authentic reproductions of places, marked by the collector, where the singers failed, or whether D. C. Sen made these marks himself, under the impression that something is missing in these strophes.[42] In the latter case, however, I am sure his impressions were misleading. It is not difficult to observe, on the basis of other parts in which no 'lacunas' are marked, that the predilection of our folk-author was not for epic, but that his preference lay with the lyrical portions. Let us, once more, seek to trace it through the whole ballad.

In the 1st, as well as in the 2nd canto, more space is given to the lyrical portions—the description of Sunāi's beauty, of the sufferings of the mother and her daughter—than to epic elements. By far the greater part of the long 4th canto is taken up by the emotional soliloquy of Sunāi and by the love-letters of both the lovers, which are naturally of an expressly lyrical character. The following epic narration is shortened to a minimum, more space being allotted to the girl's lamentations over her uncle's betrayal and her uncertain future. The abduction of the girl and the fight on the river, events undoubtedly attractive for a real epic poet, are described in a very few verses, whereas the lamentation of Sunāi, in the same canto, is given thirty verses. In a mere four couplets, the girl is married, and after that the listener learns that Mādhab's father has been imprisoned. Very briefly the poet tells of Mādhab going to get his father released, but 36 verses are given to the *Bāromāsī* depicting the sufferings of Sunāi. Only in the concluding canto is there more action, but even here Sunāi's words of farewell to life are reproduced in full.

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[42] To ascertain the truth and to find out to what extent the editor rearranged some parts of the individual ballads, as he mentioned in his Prefaces, I tried to see the collector's manuscripts; they are in the keeping of one of Prof. D. C. Sen's sons. Unfortunately, I was able only to ascertain that they still exist, but was not given the opportunity to read them.

This characteristic feature of our ballad explains its rather peculiar division; it consists seemingly of twenty more or less independent parts, conceived like acts in a modern drama and in most cases unconnected with each other. Some of them are so remote in their associations that it takes the listener some time to find the necessary orientation; some of them have even an exposition of their own (especially IV. 1-3, then IV. 11 cff and IX. 39). They are short, but plastic pictures, meant to evoke a certain atmosphere.

We do not find any colophon, throughout the ballad; the editor thinks that the author was afraid to reveal his name in a composition attacking a Dewan.

The ballad was collected not only from a professional singer, but also from some boatmen who "sang it in chorus at boat-races."[43] This fact indicates that after all, the knowledge of the Mymensingh ballads was not, in all cases, limited to professional singers only.

6. "Rūpabatī". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, I. 2., pp. 239-60. 468 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De in various villages and sent on the 30th March, 1920.

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[43] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, Mymensingh, I. 1, ed. cit., p. 141.

The short ballad of *Rūpabatī* is, according to the editor, based on a historical event. The editor says, in his English Preface: "For some reasons which I am not allowed to disclose, I will not mention the names of the persons who helped Chandra Kumar in recovering the song. They purposely omitted some portions in which further particulars about the principal characters of the song were given; and following Chandra Kumar's advice I had to change the names of the hero, heroine and of their native place as originally found in the ballad."[44] By doing so, the editor even, in one case, gave Mālābatī instead of Rūpabatī (IV. 37) and Jaypur instead of Rāmpur (III. 13).

Contents: The Zamindar Rājchandra, Raja of Rāmpur, has lived for three years at the Nawab's residence in Murshidabad. His wife is very anxious to have their only daughter Rūpabatī married. Even the astrologers advise her unanimously—though their fortune-telling differs considerably from each other—to marry the girl and so the mother asks the father to come back immediately and make arrangements for the daughter's marriage. But her letter is read by the Nawab who decides that Rūpabatī should be sent to his palace and married to him. Raja does not know what to do; to give his daughter to a Muslim would mean to sin against his caste and religion, but he does not dare to refuse the mighty master. The problem is solved by the Rani; without saying anything to her husband, she secretly marries her daughter to the poor servant Madan and, the same night, sends the couple away in a boat. In the morning, the boatman leaves them in a jungle where they are found by two brother-fishermen. The childless wife of one of them adopts the young couple. After some years, Madan goes to see his parents, but he is arrested as the abductor of the Raja's daughter. Rūpabatī, accompanied by the two fishermen and foster-mother, comes to the court of the Raja, relates all that happened and the Raja has to recognize her marriage to Madan.

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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

There is another, much shorter version of the end (54 verses) attached to the ballad. According to it, Raja decides to marry his daughter to the first man he meets one morning. Rani arranges things so that he meets Madan first which results in an unequal marriage. D. C. Sen is undoubtedly right in stating that this version is hardly authentic. As a matter of fact, it does not solve Raja's difficulties at all, not removing the cause of Nawab's wrath, whereas the other version does it by transferring the guilt to the 'abductor'. Besides, as also stated by D. C. Sen, the motif of the shorter version is of an outspoken fairy-tale-character.

We can thus accept the longer version as authentic and consider it to be a poetic record of a real event. In form as well as in spirit, it is a real folk-creation.

Worth noting is the folk-author's approach to this event and its actors. On reading it, we gain the impression of an objective record, without bias or prejudice. The poet does not comment, in any way, on the actions of the persons involved, especially of Raja, Rani and Nawab. Unlike other authors of ballads, he does not even expatiate on Rūpabatī's beauty, the description of which is restricted to the epithet 'beautiful' and one single simile 'like the moon'. Nor is the moral of the story stressed.

This 'recording style' comes out very clearly when compared with monologues and dialogues containing numerous and sometimes very charming metaphors and similes, whereas they occur only very rarely in the narrator's parts, which are purely epic in character. Let us give two examples of the metaphoric richness of the dialogues. In the 3rd canto, Raja laments: "Crocodiles in water eat my ribs,/tigers in the forest eat my whole body,// a spear tears my heart into two parts." (III. 18-20.) Rani weeps on seeing the necessity for her daughter's departure: "Golden dove, rib of your mother's chest,/how shall I let you fly away and leave the cage empty?" (III. 117-18.)

Rather unusual in folk-poetry is the attempt made here to differentiate some of the persons by their diction. Thus the Nawab uses more Urdu words (*chhurat jamālī*, *khetāb*, *chhāhebān*, etc.) than the Raja, and also the diction of the astrologers gives a 'professional' impression.

This analysis shows that the folk-author of *Rūpabatī* was no primitive and that a certain simplicity in the epic parts of his ballad is not due to a lack of poetic art or technique.

In this case, too, we cannot speak of any religious bias, of any anti-Muslim feeling. It is sufficient to mention the astrologers who are clearly ridiculed by the poet as mere greedy frauds. But there is a distinct social undertone to be felt in the ballad; the story itself is a criticism to the rich and their machinations, the victim of which, after all, is only Madan and nobody else. We shall have a better opportunity, later on, to go into this point in more detail.

7. "Kaṅka o Līlā". *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, I. 2., pp. 263-312. 1194 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De, no further data available.

The long ballad of Kaṅka and Līlā mentions four authors, in the colophons, and resembles, in a way, the ballad of Chandrābatī.

Contents : Kaṅka is the son of a poor Brahmin. As a baby, he lost both his parents and was adopted by a Chaṇḍāl couple. But they, too, die very soon and Kaṅka is adopted again by the Brahmin Garga, who gives him a good education. Garga's daughter Līlā is very fond of Kaṅka and, later on, they fall in love with each other. Kaṅka is well versed in Hindu scriptures, but a Muslim saint adoring the Hindu-Muslim deity Satya-Pīr causes a change of heart and the boy composes a song in praise of Satya-Pīr. His composition becomes famous all over the country, but the local Brahmin community hates Kaṅka and succeeds in inciting Garga against him. The old Brahmin believes the slander that Kaṅka has seduced Līlā, and poisons his food. Līlā who has seen it asks Kaṅka to leave their house ; the poisoned food is eaten by a cow which dies, making Garga guilty of a great sin. In a dream, Kaṅka sees the saint Chaitanya and goes to join him. Too late Garga comes to his senses and his disciples in vain try to find Kaṅka and to bring him back ; people say he was drowned. Līlā is unable to bear her sufferings. When, at last, Kaṅka comes back, Līlā is dead and Garga leaves his home.

From the editor's Preface we learn that Kaṅka is considered, in local tradition, to be an historical person contemporary with Chaitanya, who lived in the 16th century. D. C. Sen even gives a brief English summary of Kaṅka's composition celebrating Satya-Pīr and mentioned in the ballad.[45] This composition, called

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[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 211-2.

Satya-Pīrer kathā or *Vidyāsundar*, is said here to have been collected by C. K. De.

We shall resist the temptation to discuss that very interesting Hindu-Muslim deity as not being directly connected with the subject of the present study, and concentrate on the ballad itself.

It is undoubtedly too long to sustain the interest of listeners, its contents being rather poor. Lyrical portions, such as the lamentations of Līlā, are also too drawn out. In this, as in some other respects, the ballad reminds us of certain classical compositions. Thus, for instance, the language of the ballad is more influenced by Sanskrit elements than the majority of folk-composition from Mymensingh ; compound words are more frequent—in one case, we have even a whole-verse-compound (VIII. 15)—and the use of other metres than *payār* is also more frequent.

The names of four poets are mentioned in colophons : Raghusūt (nine-times), Dāmodar Dās (six-times), Nayānchānd Ghosh (three-times) and Śrīdhar Bāniyā (once). Raghusūt appears, in his colophons, to be a baroque type ; he never fails to stress how powerful is fate and how useless every effort to avoid it. Whereas most of his colophons use the *payār*-metre (eight out of nine), Dāmodar Dās prefers *tripadī* and his colophons are more closely connected with the story of the ballad. D. C. Sen characterizes, in his Preface, the individual poets named in colophons, but the text itself, as it has been preserved, hardly entitles us to reach his conclusions.

Particularly striking is the frequent use of the *tripadī*-metre in the ballad ; as rightly noted by D. C. Sen, this metre was preferred by classical poets, but in our ballads, we do not come across it very often. In

Kaṅkā o Līlā it is neither restricted to portions attributable, according to the colophons, to some of the poets mentioned, nor concentrated in parts having a certain emotional colouring.

Last but not the least, the ballad has a much stronger religious implication than the rest, but even so it cannot be considered to be propaganda for a certain sect. Its chief motif—that of the love of Kaṅka and Līlā—is secular and in full accord with the themes of the other *gītikās*. And so is also the criticism pointed against the Brahmin community which is, as a matter of fact, the main culprit in this case and the immediate cause of the tragedy of a beautiful love.

8. "Dewānā Madinā" (Ālāl o Dulāl). *Maimansiṃha-gītikā*, I. 2., pp. 351-87. 822 verses. Collected by C. K. De, no further data available.

According to the editor, this ballad has as its theme an historical event which took place in the middle of the 18th century. The tradition and colophons ascribe its authorship to Mansur Bayātī, of whom nothing is known. D. C. Sen is undoubtedly right in stating that most probably he was an illiterate folk-poet, "not indebted to any culture save what he got from his little rural world." [46]

Contents: Without any introduction, the listeners are confronted with the dying wife of the Dewan of Bānyāchanga; the mother of two little boys, Ālāl and Dulāl. The wife entreats the husband not to marry again, after her death, for the sake of their sons who would be certainly killed by the step-mother, and tells

[46] *Eastern Bengal Ballads (Mymensingh Ballads)*, I. 1., ed. cit., p. 285.

him a fable about a pair of doves, with a point confirming her fears. The Dewan promises to obey her last wish and, after she is dead, does not care for anything but his boys, so that his town is in a bad situation. His councillors persuade him, at last, that all step-mothers are not alike; and Dewan Sonāfar marries again, but does not allow his second wife to approach the children. She is jealous of the boys and decides to remove them in order to become the real mistress of the palace. She pretends to have a deep love for the boys, the Dewan believes her and finally lets her take care of the children. Then she bribes the public executioner to take Ālāl and Dulāl for a sail in a boat and drown them in the river. But the executioner's heart melts on hearing the lamentations of the boys and he sells them to a rich farmer. Ālāl manages very soon to run away and is found by Dewan Sekendār whose favourite he becomes, because of his ability, virtues and faithful service. Twelve years later, Sekendār offers Ālāl one of his two daughters in marriage, but Ālāl wants first to fulfil his duty. As the wage for his twelve years' service, he gets 500 servants and 200 soldiers and goes with them to Bānyāchanga, where he starts building a large house. His father had long since died and the town is ruled by the son who was born after Ālāl and Dulāl were removed. Ālāl refuses to pay any taxes to this new Dewan, defeats the army sent to punish him, and himself takes over the Dewan's office. Then he finds his brother Dulāl, with the help of a herdsman's song, and asks him to return to Bānyāchanga, too. In the meantime, Dulāl has married Madinā, the daughter of his master, and they have a child, a little son; nevertheless, he obeys his brother, sends a letter of divorce to his wife and leaves for Bānyāchanga. Madinā is unable to believe that he could betray her in such a way and sends her brother and her son to bring Dulāl back; but they return with the same reply. Madinā's sorrow is so deep that she dies in a short time. When Dulāl who had married the Dewan Sekendār's other daughter remembers her, it is too late. Returning to his first father-in-law's house, he finds only the grave of the faithful Madinā. Then he gives up the worldly life and spends the rest of his years at Madinā's grave as a poor fakir.

In its conception, the ballad has much in common with a novel; it covers a long lapse of time and is rich in action, combinations and plots. The lyrical element is pushed into the background by the epic element, but not altogether silenced, lyrical portions being freely interspersed (the mourning of the Dewan, the thoughts of the step-mother, the lamentation of Madinā). In a very interesting way, the fable of the doves introduces the ballad and indicates what course the story will take, but only in its first part. In this sense, the ballad lacks unity of action, its first part being a story of the hatred of a step-mother towards her step-children, and the second a ballad of love, the plot of which appears rather late. Taking into account, too, the adventures of Ālāl, which are given considerable space, we must consider the whole song to be made up of a chain of different stories, only the last of which represents a true *gītikā*, as we know it from other examples in our collection.

It is a Muslim ballad from beginning to end, there being no single non-Muslim figure or problem. Its main actors are members of Dewan family, practically the only exception being Madinā, the heroine or, rather, the main object of the listener's compassion. She falls a victim to her husband's craving after power and wealth; and in this respect, the ballad is fully in keeping with the spirit of the folk-tradition as embodied in the other ballads from Mymensingh.

From the point of view of its form, too, the ballad may be called a typical folk-creation. Its diction and metaphors are 'rustic', as rightly claimed by D. C. Sen, but have great charm. The poet does not try to be original in any way and takes his similes and metaphors from the treasury of folk-poetry. He even does not hesitate to repeat the same metaphors in different situations and as if spoken by different persons. Thus both the Dewan (II. 77) and his dying wife (I. 23) call their sons 'golden buds'; "children are thorns in the body of the step-mother", says not only Sonāfar's first wife (I. 27) and the dove in her fable (I. 57 and 72), but also Sonāfar himself (II. 56 and 57) and his second wife (III. 13, 15, 87; IV. 18). 'Blood of his heart' is what Sonāfar calls his sons (II. 59), and the same metaphor is used by their step-mother (III. 41) and by Dulāl speaking of his own son (VII. 2). "The stone is melted by his lamentations" three times (III. 80, IV. 92, VII. 143), etc.

In short, the ballad is a true folk-epic, which does not try to introduce any innovations in the lyrical diction, being content with the poetic means offered to him by his predecessors, but concentrating single-mindedly on his only goal—to give his countrymen an interesting and touching story in a simple garb. And this task he has undoubtedly fulfilled with marked success.

D. C. Sen has many words of warm appreciation for this ballad and its simple charm and especially for the *Bāromāsī* included in it. I would like to quote from his Preface the following sentence, at least: " This ballad proves, beyond all doubt, that the language of the people which we have hated so long, shows the true nature of our vernacular and is a storehouse of its most powerful instruments to a greater extent than the finished classical style of the learned folk."[47] As a non-Bengali, I would not dare to say the same words myself, but I do dare to applause them, with all my heart, not forgetting that they were spoken by such a great connoisseur and lover of the Bengali language and literature like Dineśchandra Sen.

9. "Dhopār Pāṭ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., pp. 3-28. 471 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De in various villages and sent in on the 15th November, 1924.

We agree fully with the editor in two points—that this ballad is one of the most beautiful folk-ballads from Mymensingh and that it may possibly be one of the oldest.

Contents: Kāñchanmālā, the daughter of Raja's washerman Godhā, falls in love with the young prince, the son of the Raja. To conceal their love, they meet only at nights; but somebody informs Raja of their secret and he orders Godhā to find a bridegroom for Kāñchanmālā at once. Both the lovers leave their homes secretly and take shelter with the nighbouring Raja's washerman. The prince himself washes the laundry from the palace, until the princess Rukmiṇī sees him and succeeds in making him leave Kāñchanmālā. The girl does not know that he has married Rukmiṇī; she thinks he is somewhere in the world and waits for him for a full year. Then a rent-collector hears of her beauty and asks her to marry him. She has to run away again, and is adopted by a childless merchant. Returning from a trip, the merchant tells Kāñchanmālā about an old washerman whom he heard lamenting the loss of his only daughter. The girl remembers her father, asks the merchant to take her back home and meets her father again. Now she learns of the marriage of her prince. She sees him for the last time, without revealing her identity, and then makes an end to her life in the waves of the river.

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[47] *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (*Mymensingh Ballads*) I. 1., ed. cit., pp. 286-87.

The ballad has some undeniable qualities—wonderful compactness, unity of action and the fact that it consistently follows its artistic aim.

It is a beautiful ballad of love, but with a clearly perceptible *social point*; at the very beginning, though in love with the prince, Kāñchanmālā hesitates to surrender herself, knowing that " the love between a big (man) and a small (woman) " can hardly be happy (III. 16) and the old washerman Godhā repeats the same maxim, in the conclusion of the ballad (XII. 21). The whole song, then, is composed as if only to prove its truth. From the very first, Kāñchanmālā is well aware of the deep social gulf between herself and the prince and warns him. But she yields to her feelings and his persuasions and leaves her home, gives up her ' reputation and family ' and follows him where he leads her; in the end, she falls a victim to his betrayal, because he prefers Rukminī who is his equal in wealth and social position. The folk-author does not try, in the least, to justify the prince's deed in the eyes of his listeners, he does not even suggest that it may have been Rukmiṇī's beauty which captured his heart.

The social point of the ballad is stressed by the fact that the poet confronts two very clearly differentiated social groups: the Rajas (Zamindar, his son, Rukminī) and washermen (Godhā, his daughter, the second washerman, his wife). Let us repeat—*social groups*, not castes. The loss of caste, as a result of the ill-matched marriage of the young couple, is mentioned only once (II. 20), and then not by the prince, but by Kāñchanmālā who, in other places (II. 5, III. 26, V. 21), is willing to sacrifice her 'reputation and family'.[48] And let us add that the whole ballad is completely void of any religious elements, which do not appear in it even on such a small scale as we sometimes come across in other Mymensingh ballads.

In all these respects, especially in its spontaneous social tendency, the *Dhopār pāṭ* is a pure folk-creation.

The composition of the ballad reminds us, in more than one respect, of *Mahuyā*, especially in its first part. Nearly three-fourths of the whole song consist of monologues or dialogues. According to D. C. Sen's division (somewhat too detailed, I think), there are whole cantos without any narration: canto I (the dialogue of the lovers), II (the monologue of Kāñchanmālā unable to meet her prince), III (another monologue of the girl) and V (the dialogue of the couple when running away). These parts are in no way connected one with another and the listener's orientation is a bit difficult. It is possible, of course, that this confusion may be due to the loss of some verses.

I would like to draw the reader's attention especially to the monologue of Kāñchanmālā, in cantos II and III. It is a real pearl of folk-poetry. In charming images and with a deep insight into the soul of the girl, it succeeds in expressing everything: the girl's longing for her lover, as well as her fears for the future, her grief that she cannot keep the appointment, as well as the hesitation of her virginal chastity; and her final determination to give up everything for her love. In this nocturnal monologue, the girl's fondness ripens into the firm love of a woman, which the folk-poet succeeds in expressing in less than fifty verses and with the use of no more than ten metaphors.

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[48] Very significant, in this connection, is the verse V. 21 in which Kāñchanmālā says to the prince: "You left your home I (gave up) family and reputation"—the loss of caste is not even mentioned!

It is passages such as this—and Bengali folk-poetry has many of them, even in its lyrical songs—which allow us to appreciate, fully and truly, the mastery of folk-poets, whom we are often inclined to regard as primitives, but their poetry perfected in the course of generations is certainly not deserving of contempt.

No less happy is the selection of 'nature miniatures' used in the ballad to introduce a certain atmosphere and limited, in most cases, to one verse only—the first verse of the *payār*-couplet. We find miniatures of this kind in many other ballads, too, so that we may see in them one of the characteristic features of the Mymensingh ballads. We shall have the opportunity, later on, to discuss them in more detail.

In full accord with the lyrical character of the larger part of the ballad, in which the narration, as stated above, is of secondary importance, are comparatively frequent metaphors and similes, most of which also appear in other ballads.

The regular metre, the simple diction and syntax and the rhyme technique of the ballad give a strong impression of antiquity. The same was the impression of D. C. Sen, who says: "What the age of the poem is I cannot definitely say, but it is one of the sweetest love-poems in our language and both by the testimony of its language and the freedom from all conventions, it seems to me, as I have already said, to be one of the earliest of the ballads that we have yet come across."[49]

10. " Maiśāl Bandhu ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., pp. 31-78, 497 + 343 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De and sent on the 7th November, 1923 (1st version) and 7th January, 1924 (2nd version).

The ballad on the 'Friend Herdsman' was not preserved completely; on the other hand, the collector succeeded in getting two different versions of the preserved torso, the comparison of which can help us considerably to penetrate deeper into the problem of the creation and preservation of folk-ballads. Both versions have much in common as well as many divergences.

Contents : Ḍiṅgādhar is the son of a poor farmer; as a baby, he lost his mother, and his father, due to unpropitious circumstances, fell into heavy debt to Balarām and died before being able to repay it. Ḍiṅgādhar becomes the herdsman of Balarām's buffaloes, in order to pay off his father's debt, and often plays his flute beside the river where Balarām's beautiful daughter Sujāti comes to bathe. One day her pitcher is carried away by the stream, Ḍiṅgādhar rescues it and thus he makes Sujāti's acquaintance and both of them fall in love. But Ḍiṅgādhar neglects Balarām's buffaloes, one of them grazes the Zamindar's paddy and Balarām is imprisoned. Ḍiṅgādhar confesses his guilt and goes to prison instead of his master, but, in order to redeem his buffaloes, confiscated by the Zamindar, Balarām has to mortgage all his property at the village usurer. Ḍiṅgādhar is then released, and, afraid of returning to his master, he runs away, but, when cross-ing the river, narrowly escapes drowning and is rescued by a rich merchant from the East who adopts him and, after his death, leaves him all his wealth. Ḍiṅgādhar returns home and sends a match-maker to propose his marriage to Sujāti; her father died, in the meantime, and the girl lives with her mother in terrible poverty and oppression by the usurer, who forced Sujāti to marry his son. Ḍiṅgādhar pays off their debt, in disguise tests the girl's virtue and then marries her. Of the second part, only a torso is preserved. When bathing, the young wife is seen by Maghuyā, a merchant from Chittagong, who falls in love with her. To get rid of Ḍiṅgādhar, Maghuyā makes friends with him and takes him along for a business trip to the north. One night, when Ḍiṅgādhar falls asleep alone in Maghuyā's boat, Maghuyā cuts the mooring rope and sends the boat out to sea, himself returning in Ḍiṅgādhar's boat. When Sujāti comes to welcome him, thinking that her husband has returned, Maghuyā abducts her. The continuation of the first version was not recovered.

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[49] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, II. 1., ed. cit., p. 8.

The *second version*, the beginning of which may also have got lost, starts with a monologue by the enamoured Sujāti, whose family is not mentioned at all ; then we are acquainted with the story of the pitcher carried away by the stream, and with the meeting of the young couple. Here also, the herdsman who is in love with Sujāti [he is called simply *maishāl* ('herdsman')] neglects his buffaloes and, after the Zamindar's paddy is grazed, he is banished from the country. In desperation he wants to drown himself in the river, but is rescued by a merchant from the East, who teaches him to do business and gives him the name Ḍiṅgādhar. During one of his trips, Ḍiṅgādhar makes friends with

Maghuyā, who invites him to Chittagong. They pass, in their boat, Ḍiṅgādhar's previous home and Sujāti, hearing the well-known flute of her lover, runs away with them. But Maghuyā wants to have her for himself. To get rid of his rival, he makes Ḍiṅgādhar accompany him on a business trip to the north and, at a river junction, separates from him, leaving Ḍiṅgādhar to go into a country where he is probable to perish. But a storm brings Ḍiṅgādhar back home and it is Maghuyā who is reported to be drowned. Having waited for his friend for three years in vain, Ḍiṅgādhar marries Maghuyā's sister Maynā. Another five years pass and Maghuyā comes back, changed so much that nobody recognizes him and he is turned out of his own house. To take his revenge he incites the Raja of Chittagong against Ḍiṅgādhar, who orders Ḍiṅgādhar to be executed and his two wives to be brought to his harem. The rest of this version is lost.

Undoubtedly we have two variants of the same story here; they either have a common origin in an older and now completely lost version, or one of them is a later elaboration and rewriting of the other. The latter solution is more probable, also in the view of D. C. Sen. Both versions have about one hundred verses in common, in many cases-literally, in others with minor stylistic and lexical deviations. D. C. Sen thinks the *second version* (*B*), preserved in a shorter torso, to be older than the *first* (*A*): "Though we miss much of the humour and poetry of the added cantos, in the second version, yet we find in it a greater compactness, a keener eye to relevancy, and a homogeneity which undoubtedly prove it to be the original ballad."[59]

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[59] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, II. 1., ed. cit., p. 35.

I am afraid, however, that these reasons are not sufficiently convincing grounds making us believe, like D. C. Sen that *version B* is the older and original version. We must first ask ourselves : Why are there two versions of the same story which, in spite of all common features and verses, have so many differences, even in the *story* itself ? It might be because either the original version was lost and it was necessary to recompose it, or the original elaboration did not satisfy the listeners and the singers and the story was 're-written'. The former explanation is rather weak ; it does not explain the large number of common verses, on the one hand, and great differences in the contents, on the other. It is unlikely that in the case of a favourite ballad, the story itself could have been forgotten to such an extent. Taking *version B*, however, we really find it 'defective' and unsatisfying, in many respects : it does not say who Ḍiṅgādhar and Sujāti were, it 'drops' the kind merchant from the East, without bringing his story to an end, it does not explain why Ḍiṅgādhar also marries Maynā (the latter inconsistency is also noticed by D. C. Sen), the plot against Ḍiṅgādhar schemed by Maghuyā is very naive and ineffective, etc. *Version A* makes good all these defects. On the other hand, we cannot rid of the impression that the author of this later version sometimes took over rather mechanically and inattentively from his predecessor, as in this example : In *version B*, we learn that, in order to get rid of Ḍiṅgādhar, Maghuyā takes him on a business trip to the *north*[51], which is quite logical considering the fact that they are in Chittagong. But in *version A*, the folk-poet mechanically takes over the northern direction of his journey with

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[51] *bānijyete yāibām āmi uttar mayāle* (2nd version, VI. 22).

Ḍiṅgādhar[52], and then lets Maghuyā cut the moorings of the boat with the sleeping Ḍiṅgādhar, so that it may be carried away by the stream. But in Mymensingh, where all the rivers flow from north to south, the boat would only return *home* with Ḍiṅgādhar. Unfortunately, the rest of the torso does not allow us to know if this did not actually happen.

Besides, let us mention the fact that *version B*, original as we consider it to be, accounts very well for the name of 'Ḍiṅgādhar', meaning 'he who holds a boat', which suits a merchant better than a herdsman; *version A* simply calls the hero Ḍiṅgādhar from the very beginning.

It is a well-known fact that, in the case of folk-poetry, different versions of the same song are materials most valuable for research. For this reason, I shall compare in greater detail especially those portions of the two versions in which there occur only less conspicuous differences; we find here sometimes, poetic images which do not appear in other ballads from Mymensingh.

VERSION A

1. *Sujan chinyā pirīt karā bara bisham leṭhā,*
bhāla phul tulite gele aṅge lāge kāṭā. IV. 67-68.

VERSION B

Sujan chinyā pirīt karā baṛa bisham leṭhā,
bhāla phul tulite gele aṅge lāge kāṭā. IV. 13-14.

"It's a great pain to make the acquaintance of a friend and love him, when you go to pluck a lovely blossom, a thorn pricks your body."

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[52] *Āranger deś āchhe uttar pāṭane* (p. 54, verse 33 of the 2nd part), and again *bānijya karite yāy uttar nagare* (verse 44 of the same).

VERSION A

2. *Āmita abalā nārīre bandhu hailām antar puṛā,*
kūl bhāṅgile nadīr yeman madhye paṛe chaṛā. IV. 69-70.

VERSION B

Āmita abulā nārīre bandhu hailām antarpurā,
kūl bhāṅgile nadīr jal madhye paṛe chaṛā. IV. 9-10.

"I am a weak woman, my friend, my heart is burnt,[53]
(as if) a shoal should appear in the middle of the river,
when the bank breaks."

These two couplets represent, in our analysis, a *situational* variant, first of all, their textual differences being unimportant. In *version B*, they form an organic part of the girl's lamentation after her lover has vanished; in *version A*, however, they are inserted into the girl's soliloquy, after her first meeting with the herdsman. Undoubtedly they suit the situation in *version B* better.

VERSION A

3. *Kaite nāhi pāri kathā bāp māyer kāchhe,*
līlārī bātāse mor antar puṛyā gechhe. IV. 73-74.

VERSION B

Kaite nāri maner kathā māo bāper kāchhe,
līlārī bātāse āmār antar puirā gechhe. IV. 17-18.

"I cannot say anything (my heart's secret) to my parents,
my heart was burnt in the playful wind."

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[53] Such is the meaning, according to D. C. Sen, who explains the last two words of the first verse as *dagdha hriday* (a burnt heart, or having the heart burnt) in both cases, neglecting the textual difference of r and ṛ; but could not 'antarpurā' be derived from *antaḥpur* (the inner apartment), cognate with *antaḥpurikā* (a woman living in the inner apartment)? Undoubtedly, it would better suit the situation as well as the second verse of the couplet; the girl is imprisoned, in the ladies' apartment, like a river shoal surrounded by water from all sides.

It is a case very similar to the preceding one, with the difference that the couplet suits the situation in *version A* quite well. The girl cannot confide about her love to the parents, who are looking for a good bridegroom for her.

VERSION A

4. *Manere bujhāi kata man nā māne mānā,*
e bharā yauban kalsī dine dine ūṇā. IV. 79-80.

"My soul doesn't mind, though I explain to it,
this full pitcher of youth gets empty day after day."

VERSION B

Kata kairā bujhāi pākhī nāi se māne mānā,
bharā kalsī hailare bandhu dine dine uṅā. IV. 23-24.

"The bird doesn't mind, though I explain to him,
the full pitcher became empty, friend, day after day."

The versions differ somewhat, because of the difference in the preceding verses. In *version B*, 'the bird' is easily explainable by the metaphor used just before: *pinjarā chhāṛiyā man bātāse uṛay* ("the soul flies away in the wind, leaving the cage"). In *version A*, this metaphor is not used, so that 'the bird' of our example had to be replaced by 'the soul'. In the second verse of the couplet, *version A* also added 'the youth', making the metaphor more clear.

VERSION A

5. *Pakshī yadi haitāmre bandhu uṛiyā uṛiyā,*
tomār mukh dekhtām bandhu ḍālete basiyā.
Ichchhā hay tomār lāgyā chhāṛi kulmān,
muchhāiyā śītal kari tomār aṅger ghām.
Tumi yathā thākare bandhu āmi thāki tathā,
raudra kāle chhāyār lāgyā śire dhari pātā. IV. 83-88.

"If I were a bird, my friend, I would fly,
I would see your face, sitting on a branch.
I would like to give up my family and reputation for you,
to cool your body by wiping off your sweat.
I stay where you stay, my friend,
I hold a leaf for shadow over your head in hot summer."

VERSION B

Pakshī yadi haitāmre bandhu yāitām uṛiyā
dekhitām tomār mukh bandhu ḍālete basiyā.
Tumi yathā thākte bandhu āmi thāktām tathā,
dāruṇ raudete bandhu śire dhartām pātā. IV. 27-30.

This is one of the most significant cases. In the original *version B*, the idea of holding a leaf over the head of the beloved is inseparably connected with the desire of the girl to become a bird. In *variant A*, however, these two poetic images are separated from each other by a couplet taken from another canto of the *version B* (II. 81-82). In both these cases, the poetic images in *version B* follow one another very logically. Thus the idea of wiping off the sweat follows a passage in which the girl regrets that her beloved has to get wet in the rain and perspire in the sun's heat. This context is missing in *version A*. We can certainly conclude that in this portion, the originality of *version B* is obvious.

VERSION A

6. *Bhijā nīlāmbarī phuṭyā bāhir hay gāyer rūp,*
ghāṭete basiyā kainyā khoyāy pancha khup. IX. 11-2.

"Through the wet blue sari the beauty of her body peeps out,
sitting at the ghat, the girl loosens her five hair-knots."

VERSION B

Ghāṭete basiyā kainyā khoyāy pancha khop,
bhijā basan diyā kanyār phuṭyā bāir hay rūp.

Leaving aside interchange of the first and second verses, the situational change made in *version A* is an improvement. *Version B* introduces this couplet before the first meeting of the both young people, as a so-to-say objective description of the girl ; *version A* transfers the couplet to the second part of the ballad, introducing it as a hint of the desirous eyes with which Maghuyā saw Sujāti.

These parallels are certainly sufficient to prove that we are fully justified in speaking of the 'transplantation' of a considerable number of poetic images, verses and even whole portions from one version to the other and that the majority of cases testify to the originality of *version B*.

It is interesting to note, too, that there are certain verses and couplets, which were taken over and transplanted into situations different from those in the original composition. It shows how vague and weak is sometimes the inner binding within the *payār*-couplets or, more frequently, between the individual couplets.

In the last chapter of the present study, we shall deal in detail with the similes and metaphors which are common to the individual ballads, thus forming a stock of poetic means which is, so to speak, at the disposal of any folk-poet in his work of composition. Besides these similes and metaphors which appear again and again in various folk-creations, there are others of less frequent occurrence ; practically in every Mymensingh ballad, we find some of them ; but their number differs considerably. To a certain extent, they can be taken as a testimony to the originality of the folk-poet in question, but of course with the reservation unavoidable in the case of folk-poetry in which the oral tradition results in a nivelisation of every text. Though the mechanism of preserving such long texts as our ballads is not quite clear, we may perhaps presume that this process of nivelisation, by way of omitting the original metaphors or replacing them by others which are better liked, is directly dependent on the length of time for which the ballad in question was in circulation, *i.e.*, on the antiquity of the composition.

From this point of view, too, *version A* of *Maishāl bandhu* seems to be 'younger' than *version B*, in which nearly all metaphors and similes are nivelised. *Version A* has a greater proportion of figures of speech such as I have not come across in any other ballad, *e.g.*, "in the month of Āśvin, water eats paddy on the banks" (I. 2 and I. 15), "the debt is a greater evil than all other evils, like a man who gets mad when bitten by a wasp" (II. 33), "in the river, mad waves beat the banks" (IV. 21), "four eyes met at the river ghat" (IV. 40), 'money-crocodile' (! *i.e.* usurer, IV. 6), "like a spark from the fire changes to soot in the ashes" (VII. 48), "when Ḍiṅgādhar saw it his ribs were like to burst, like gunpowder explodes noisily in fire" (VII. 49-50), "like a kite seizes a fish with his claws" (X. 28), etc.

The individuality of the folk-author of *version A* finds its expression also in another peculiar feature of his composition in a remarkable concretization of ideas which is undoubtedly a typical characteristic of folk-poetry. Thus the girl's love is expressed by very material fears concerning the herdsman and his comfort (IV. 60c ff); the usurer's avarice is depicted in a very concrete way (VII. 1-5); similar is the circumlocutory expression of the ruins of Balarām's house (VII. 40) and of the poverty of Sujāti (VII. 47). In such cases the poet accepts, in full accord with folk-tradition, many a poetic image which the classical canon of aesthetics would resolutely reject; the metaphors are realistic, sometimes even raw, but all the more effective.

Finally, I would like to return, once more, to the manner of preservation of our folk-ballads. Though preserved only in torsos, two versions of the same story, considerably differing from each other, help us towards an understanding of this difficult problem. *Maishāl baṇdhu* provides good evidence of the fact that the 'original' ballad was sometimes rewritten by another folk-poet, or other poets, quite freely, without any scruples; whole portions, as well as individual couplets and verses, were taken over, others being replaced by newly composed passages, and even the story itself was often changed. What is, however, not clear at all are the reasons which led to these changes. It might have been, of course, simple failure of memory, but more probable it seems to have been due to the effort to offer the listeners a 'better' story than the original one. In any case, the conformities between the two versons refute the theory of an extempore reproduction of our ballads.

11. "Bheluyā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., pp. 141-207. 1496 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De in Banyachanga, Mymensingh.

Though very long, the ballad of *Bheluyā* has no peculiarities which would require a special analysis. Let us, therefore, merely retell its contents and add a few notes.

Contents : Murāi, a rich merchant from Saṅkhapur is looking for a good match for his son Madan ; Mānik, another rich merchant from Kānchannagar, wants to have his daughter Bheluyā married. The two young people meet at the river ghāt and fall in love with each other.

Madan sends a parrot to Bheluyā and the bird recites a few verses taught him by his master; Madan then comes to ask for his parrot and from then on they use him as a messenger of love. Madan's father proposes the marriage of his son with Bheluyā, through a matchmaker. But Mānik who is a proud *kulīn*, rejects the proposal, considering Madan to belong to a lower caste. Madan abducts the girl as they do not want to separate, but his father, insulted by Mānik's refusal, turns them out of the house. They seek refuge in Rānchāpur, the king of which is the famous robber Ābu ; he has as many as 500 wives in his harem, but still seeks to add to their number. Bheluyā is seen by a barber's wife who sends a strand of the girl's hair to the king, along with a description of Bheluyā's beauty. In order to get rid of Mānik, Ābu orders him to go abroad and find the girl to whom the hair belongs. Madan of course recognizes the hair and they find a way to escape the robber-king. When Madan has left, Bheluyā runs away to Jaintā, where Hīran, one of Madan's friends, lives. But Hīran also falls in love with Bheluyā and wants to marry her before Madan comes back. But his intentions are divulged by his sister Menakā, who is a devoted friend of Bheluyā and they think out a trick. Bheluyā pretends to be willing to marry Hīran, but says she wants to be sure that Madan is no longer alive. Hīran sets out to kill his friend and the parrot sent by Bheluyā reveals everything to Madan in a few verses learned by rote. Madan returns without delay and takes Bheluyā away in his boat. But they are surrounded, on all four sides, by Ābu, Hīran, Hīran's father and Mānik, and the lovers jump into the water, followed by Menakā, who has come on her father's ship. The girls are rescued by another merchant passing by, but his ship is seized by Ābu and the girls are carried off to the king's harem. Madan is informed of everything by the merchant and, in disguise, enters Ābu's town and makes contact with the girls. Bheluyā then agrees to marry Ābu, but asks for a pair of parrots which Madan has and for which he gets all the stolen property of the kind merchant, which he is thus able to return to him. When Bheluyā and Ābu go to be married on board ship, in accordance with Bheluyā's request, they are caught by merchants led by Mānik and Murāi, who had been told by Madan what was going to happen. Ābu is imprisoned on a deserted island and, with the consent of their parents, Madan marries both Bheluyā and Menakā.

Bheluyā reminds us, in many respects, of another Mymensingh ballad, of *Maluyā*; there is the same breadth of contents and variety of motifs; the same, too, is the artistic method characteristic of folk-poets to tell everything at length, with many repetitions and retardations. Also in their inventory of metaphors and similes, the two ballads have much in common, both of them sometimes using the same phrases and idioms. This does not mean, however, that we may presume any direct influence or even common authorship for the two compositions. This pair of ballads are simply two blossoms of the same tree, showing the same poetic technique and the same source of inspiration.

In his Preface to the English translation of the ballad, D. C. Sen says he saw, a long time ago, "a printed edition of a ballad, called 'Bhelua' ".[54] Unfortunately, he does not record the differences between the two versions, mentioning only the fact that "the present version is quite unlike that one". Evidently the printed edition was a *puthi*, a popular elaboration of the story; it would be very interesting to compare the two versions and note the differences.

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[54] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, II. 1., ed. cit., p. 137.

12. "Kamalārāṇīr gān". *Pūrbabaṅga-gīitikā*, II. 2., pp. 211-30. 346 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De, as a torso, contents of the missing cantos sent on the 30th August, 1925.

The surviving verses form a torso; the collector succeeded in collecting the beginning of the story in a prosaic narration. In the 4th Volume of his collection, D. C. Sen published another ballad called *Rājā Raghur pālā*[55]; it covers, in its contents, the final part of the present ballad, but then continues quite independently. The comparison of the two songs shows convincingly that they do not depend on each other in any respect.

Contents : The prosaic introduction informs us that a certain king Jānakināth lives with his queen Kamalā, who wants to leave, after her death, a large tank. The king orders the tank to be dug, but it is not filled with water which means a heavy course for the king's descendants up to the fourteenth generation. The torso in verse follows : It was revealed to the king, in a dream, how water could be obtained for the tank ; the queen was to descend to the bottom of the tank and offer a sacrifice there. But the king was afraid to obey the dream, because in it, water swallowed up the queen. Kamalā does not hesitate, however; she takes leave of her only baby-son and, accompanied by large crowds of people, she goes to make the sacrifice. This done, water comes in a rush, swallowing up the queen and filling the whole tank; not even the body of the queen is found. Then the king has another dream in which he sees Kamala again. She asks him to build a hut beside the tank and to leave their baby inside so that she might come, every night, to feed him; after a year she promises to come back and live with her family. The king obeys her wish and, every night, the baby is left in the hut with a nurse, who tells the king that Kamalā really comes to feed her son. The king is so impatient that, on the last night before the year expires, he goes to see Kamalā, but she disappears for ever, as the term was not kept.

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[55] *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., ed. cit., pp. 73-89.

The ballad is different, in more than one respect, from the majority of Mymensingh epic songs. First of all, it has a lot of fairy-tale motifs and mythological colouring. It is, in fact, a 'history' of how a tank arose that exists to this day and is reported to bear the name Kamalā-dīghi. The religious element is well represented, three prophetic dreams, in such a short song, being somewhat excessive.

But also in its composition and poetic means, the ballad has its peculiarities. In what is a small total of verses, we find five passages depicting nature, which is rather rare in other ballads; especially the description in X. 1-9 of the moment before sunrise is very unusual in a folk-song. Another characteristic feature of the ballad is the tendency of its author to generalize his ideas and put them in the form of maxims (IV. 17-20, VI. 27-32, VII. 9-10, VIII. 11-12); D. C. Sen calls it 'an element of rustic pedantry'.[56]

In its inventory of similes and metaphors, the ballad has many peculiarities, too. It is quite common in folk-poetry (in Bengal as anywhere else in the world), to compare different things to natural phenomena such as the sun, the moon, the stars, etc.; thus in our ballads, a face is often compared to the moon, eyes to stars, etc. But in *Kamalārāṇīr gān*, we more than once find verses in which natural phenomena are compared to other things. For instance, the sun is compared to a jewel or lamp (X. 1c ff), the stars to blossoms (III. 14), clouds to vermilion (IV. 23). Undoubtedly it is part of the poet's imaginative gift for nature descriptions mentioned above.

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[56] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*. II. 1., ed. cit., p. 195.

In two colophons, the name of Adharchānd is given as the author of the ballad, but he remains a mere name for us, nothing being known of him.

D. C. Sen thinks that the ballad must have been composed at the beginning of the 17th century, because the heroes Kamalā and Jānakināth lived towards the end of the sixteenth, and "all such ballads, in commemoration of acts of local heroism, are composed immediately after their occurrence".[57] I disagree with him, in this point. The fairy-tale character of and elements in the ballad show, on the contrary, that the whole ballad is but a late 'explanation' for the existence of the tank and there is no reason why it should not have been composed a very long time after the happenings which it relates and which, in this case, clearly did nothing more than provide the folk-poet with a few historical personalities and the basic story.

13. "Māṇiktārā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., pp. 233-74. 832 verses. Collected by Biharilal Roy in Mymensingh and sent on the 22nd September, 1925.

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[57] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, II. 1., ed. cit., p. 195.

It is really a great pity that the ballad could not have been collected complete; the collector Biharilal Roy died, shortly after he sent the first part and before being able to collect the rest.

Contents: In the vicinity of a river near Gañjaghāt, bands of robbers are very active. In this place, the poor barber Biśu lived with his family. He was drowned in the river and four of his sons died, too, leaving their mother, with the last child Bāsu, in poverty. The mother has to beg, but she is helped by a Koch woman, whose son Kānāi makes friends with Bāsu. Both of them become robbers and, together, they rob and kill a rich Brahmin and his wife. Bāsu's mother gets to know of the incident and dies of sorrow. Bāsu finds a bride for himself in Māṇiktārā, the daughter of Sādhuśīl, and their wedding is celebrated with the prescribed Hindu pomp. After the marriage, Bāsu tells his wife all about his profession of robber and she, being skilled in the use of arms, promises to help him. One day Kānāi is taken prisoner by a hostile robber-band and Bāsu wants to rescue him. But Māṇiktārā secretly kidnaps the son of the hostile band's chieftain and offers to let him go if Kānāi is also set free. The rest of the story was not preserved.

In the colophons, two authors are mentioned: Āmir (II. 48) and Jāmāt Ullā (VI. 25-30, VII. 135), but nothing is known of them. Though dealing with a purely Hindu subject, the ballad was certainly a Muslim product; its introductory *bandanā* is purely Muslim and, in the text, we find even passages containing a criticism of Hindu marriage customs (VII. 25-30).

The folk-author (or authors) is very fond of details and his descriptions become sometimes rather boring; thus in the 5th canto, we find a long section devoted to the description of how a meal is prepared and eaten. On the other hand, the poet does not indulge in describing his heroes, not even the heroine. Dialogues are given more space, with a corresponding heightening of dramatic tension.

As far as the basic problem of the authenticity of the Mymensingh ballads is concerned, the most important circumstance is that the ballad was not collected by Chandrakumar De, as were most of these songs, but by another collector, Biharilal Roy; and yet, it does not differ substantially from the other ballads. We cannot say much about the story itself, as its conclusion was not preserved, but, in its inventory of similes and metaphors, the ballad shows the same artistic approach as the others, and also the use of many identical images.

14. "Dewān Īśā Khān Masnadāli". *Pūrbabaṅgagītikā*, II. 2., pp. 349-90. 846 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De, no other data available.

This song is a rather rare instance of an historical ballad in which the love element plays a secondary role.

Contents: Maminā Khātun, the daughter of the Sultān Jālāluddin, falls in love with her father's minister Kālidās and secretly asks him to marry her; when he refuses, unwilling to lose his Hindu caste, she makes a plot with his cook who gives him beef to eat so that he has no other choice but to become a convert to Islam. He takes the name of Sulamān and marries Maminā, becoming later on the Sultan of the country. His elder son Dāud stops paying revenue to Akbar, but he is killed in a battle. His brother Īśā Khān succeeds him and has also to run away, defeated by the army of the Moghuls, but he establishes a new kingdom in Jangalbāri and resists Akbar's army for a long time, but finally he is captured and brought to Delhi. The emperor releases him and confers on him the title Masnadāli and Īśā Khān returns home. In Sripur he is seen by the beautiful sister of the king Kedār Rāy and she asks him secretly to elope with her. This he does. He marries her and they have two sons. But when Īśā Khān dies, sixteen years later, Kedār Rāy comes to take his revenge. Pretending to want to give his two daughters in marriage to Īśā's sons, he carries off the two boys to Sripur and imprisons them. But the strong warrior Kārimullā defeats Kedār's army and kills the wicked king, after which Kedār's two daughters are married to Īśā's sons.

In an unusually long Preface to the English translation of the ballad, D. C. Sen confronts this story with what we know of Īśā Khān from Muslim chronicles and other historical sources and shows how, in more than one respect, our ballad has mingled fancy with historical truth. In this case, it was easier to prove than in other ballads telling stories which can neither be confirmed nor refuted by other sources.

The anonymous folk-author of the ballad tells his story in a simple style, not overburdened by metaphors and similes ; only in a few passages devoted to the description of the heroine's beauty do we find the style more ornamental, but here also the metaphors and similes used belong, almost exclusively, to the stock of traditional folk-poetry imagery.

As mentioned above, the erotic element is relatively weaker than in the majority of Mymensingh ballads ; but it is typical that it is just those portions dealing with the element of love which show the greatest deviations from historical reality. The ballads from Mymensingh, taken as a whole, are really, first and foremost, ballads of love.

15. "Firoz Khān Dewān". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., pp. 435-78. 922 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De.

The ballad has the character of a heroic song, with a strong erotic element.

Contents : Firoz Khān from Jangalbāri, one of the descendants of Īśā Khān, decides not to pay tribute to the Mughal emperor, but his mind is distracted from political affairs. He has seen the picture of Sakhinā, the daughter of the Dewan Umar Khān, and wants to marry her. Disguised as a fakir, he succeeds in entering the palace of Umar Khān and meeting Sakhinā; they fall in love with each other. After returning home Firoz sends a message and his portrait to Sakhinā. Unfortunately Umar is on bad terms with Firoz's family, and the minister sent to ask for Sakhinā's hand for Firoz is turned out by Umar. Firoz takes his revenge, conquers the city, expels Umar and his courtiers and marries Sakhinā. Umar asks for the help of the mighty Shah, who gives him an army to punish the disobedient Dewan; after a three days' battle, Firoz is defeated and arrested in Umar's city. The brave Sakhinā, disguised as a man, leads her army to liberate her husband and victory is within her grasp when, at the critical moment, she learns that Firoz is sending her a letter of divorce, as being the cause of his troubles. Sakhinā dies of a broken heart and her father meets his son-in-law in grief over her dead body.

In his edition of the ballads, as well as in the book of their English translations, D. C. Sen devoted a long portion to the family of Īśā Khān and to the historical ballads contained in the collection. There is, however, no information available about the happenings described in the ballad, and we must consider its contents to be a creation of poetic fancy; it is hard to believe that such important facts, from the not-so-remote past, would not be preserved in historical records.

In its composition and form, the ballad has no characteristics different from those of other epic creations from Mymensingh. Only in its diction, the Muslim element is stronger than in any other *gītikā*. This is, of course, fully in keeping with the outspoken Muslim character of the ballad describing exclusively the Muslim world.

16. "Mānjurmā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, III. 2., pp. 11-34. 470 verses. Collected by Nagendrachandra De in Mymensingh.

This relatively short ballad is very interesting in more than one respect, though very simple in its narrative.

Contents: Fakir Jāmālādi was bitten by a snake and even the famous snake-charmer Manir is not able to save him. But he takes care of Jāmālādi's little daughter Mānjurmā. When she grows up into a beautiful girl, Manir, not able to part from her, marries her. But Mānjurmā has another lover, the boy Hāsen, who is also in love with her. When Manir leaves home for three days, the lovers spend these three nights together and then run away from home. Manir comes back and finds his young wife gone. He searches for her in vain and ends his life in the river.

As also stated by D. C. Sen, the ballad was evidently composed by a Muslim, but it comprises a surprisingly large number of Hindu elements. It offers good proof of how inseparable are both religious elements, Hindu and Muslim, in the Bengali folk-culture. It is quite natural for our poet to let the Muslim fakir compare his beloved to the holy Gaṅgā, to the sacred plant *tulsī* and even to the goddess *Durgā*.

The folk-poet's approach reminds us of that of the author of *Mahuyā*—he does not comment or moralize on the acts of the heroes and persons of his ballad though there are numerous opportunities and even situations which literally call for a comment or a judgement. Neither does he excel in metaphors and similes, being quite content with those provided by folk-tradition, and sparing in their use. Unlike the other balladists, our folk-poet does not use the *payār*-metre, replacing it by fairly regular four-line verses, with the rhyme-scheme *a-b-c-b*.

Again we must stress the fact that the ballad was not collected by Chandrakumar De, yet its whole atmosphere, and especially the tragic end, does not differ from those of other Mymensingh ballads. Thus it is another valuable contribution to the polemics on the authenticity of these songs, the romantic note in which aroused such strong suspicions.

17. "Āynā Bibi". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, III. 2., pp. 191-216. 510 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De, 'sometime in 1925', place not mentioned.

This song is a remarkable example of a Muslim ballad with Hindu motives, similar to those of *Maluyā*.

Contents : Māmud Ujjāl at a tender age lost his father, who was a merchant. When he is grown up, having been reared, along with his sister, by their poor mother, he works as a farmer for some time to earn some money; then, in spite of his mother's lamentations, starts a business trip on the river. By chance he meets one of his father's old friends and falls in love with his daughter Āynā. When returning from his trip, Māmud once again stops to meet his beloved; but he learns that, in the meantime, her father died and the girl cannot be found. As a begging fakir, the unhappy Māmud looks for Āynā everywhere and finds her, at last, at the house of a distant relative, takes her with him to his own home and they marry. They live in happiness until Māmud sets out on another business journey. This time only his companions return announcing that Māmud went down with his ship in the river. Āynā secretly leaves home and, with the help of the seven sons of a kind old man, she succeeds in finding Māmud, who had survived. But she is held by society to be *asatī* (unchaste), because she left her home alone, and the weak Māmud, wanting to get rid of her, pretends to take her for a trip and then leaves her on the deserted bank of a river. She is found by a tribe of *Kurunjiyas* (Gypsies?), who for three years help her to seek her home and her husband. There is no happy meeting, however—Āynā sees, in the courtyard of Māmud's house, his new wife with a child and nobody recognizes her any more. Full of sorrow she makes an end to her life in the river. The wind carries this news to Māmud, who leaves home, grieves her death and becomes a fakir.

The similarities of this ballad with *Maluyā* are sufficiently striking. In both cases, there appear two different motifs, divided by the happy union and the wedding of the young couple. As in *Maluyā*, the heroine Āynā Bibi also saves her husband's life, but, being a victim of gossip and the narrow-minded morality of the village community, she has to die, remaining faithful to her love to the last. There is, however, a very important difference : *Maluyā* is a purely Hindu ballad and the condemnation of the devoted wife is in full accord with the ideology of the orthodox Hindu community ; in the eyes of its representatives, Maluyā must necessarily have been found guilty of having lost her caste, if only by living for such a long time in the house of a Muslim ; and the demand that she should be turned out is but a logical consequence of caste ideology.

Āynā Bibi, however, is a Muslim ballad. We know, of course, how deeply the Bengali Muslim community was influenced by Hindu ideas and customs, especially in social respects, and we can take this ballad to be another proof of this fact. But the reader can hardly help feeling, when reading basically the same story in these two versions, that it fits in better with the Hindu atmosphere. By the way, Āynā is accused, by her own community, of being *asatī*, which is, of course, a purely Hindu term.

Thus we can conclude that *Āynā Bibi* belongs to the same category of ballads like *Maluyā*, i.e., ballads dealing with injustice resulting from the inhumane views and customs of an orthodox community.

18. "Syām Rāyer Pālā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, III. 2., pp. 273-94. 397 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De, between 1922-25, in different villages of Mymensingh.

It is a great pity that this ballad was not preserved in a better state ; it was collected from various singers and, as stated by D. C. Sen, it is evidently still incomplete.

Contents: Śyām Rāy, the son of a Raja, has seen a Ḍom woman and fallen in love with her. She is married already to a man of her own low caste, and though she returns his love, she warns Śyām that such an unequal relationship cannot bring them happiness. Śyām's mother and sister try to dissuade him and his father is full of anger, but Śyām refuses to listen to them. When the husband of his beloved is not at home, Śyām spends a night with her and then they run away together to the land of Gābariyas, Śyām pretending to be a Ḍom, too. But the king of this land is a bad man and as soon as he is informed by a spy about the beautiful Ḍom woman, he orders her to be brought to his harem and Śyām to be imprisoned; he has to remain in prison until the Ḍom woman promises to become the king's wife. On returning home, Śyām learns that everything was a plot of his own father, who thus wanted to rid his son of the Ḍom woman; then Śyām Rāy takes his army, defeats and imprisons the king of the Gābariyas and destroys their city. But in the fighting, he is wounded with a poisoned arrow and dies. The Ḍom woman dies, too, taking poison, because she does not want to live without him.

The story of the ballad is not very ingenious and could even be considered lacking in logic; but this may be due to the bad state of preservation of the text and possible lacunae. But the strong point of the song is its poetic beauty. From this point of view, it is one of the most beautiful epic compositions from Mymensingh. There are whole cantos, especially II and V, which really are poetically outstanding. The folk-poet—according to four colophons, his name was Nitāi Chānd—creates whole chains of similes and metaphors, strictly in the spirit of folk-poetry, taking their materials from his surroundings and nature, and seems to follow, as his only artistic aim, the description of the lovers' psychology which none of his fellow-poets is able to express with such plasticity and poetical imagery. The dialogues between Śyām and the Ḍom woman help to heighten the appeal of the ballad.

Even in his more general maxims, the poet consistently follows the chief motif of his song—love. He looks at it as if from various angles: the Ḍom woman warns Śyām that love between two people, 'one big and one small', necessarily results in the loss of caste (III. 2),[58] but Śyām Rāy's reply is very bold: "Youth is no dust and clay, caste is not love" (V. 4). The Ḍom woman is herself, at last, overcome by love and her words are a generalization which stands above any caste prejudice: "For anybody who has eaten the fruit of the tree of love,/scandal and death do not exist, his life is fruitful" (V. 48-9). Also the colophons of the folk-poet all centre around love and youth, up to one of the concluding couplets: "Nitāi Chānd says: You need not be afraid of death,/when one heart merges with another, there is no re-birth" (X. 69-70).

One feature of this ballad must strike every reader acquainted with classical Bengali literature—a considerable independence of the folk-poet in relation to the ideology of Hindu caste society, very similar to that which we found in *Mahuyā*. In accordance with reality, the poet cannot let such an ill-matched love be victorious and happy, but he glorifies it, in spite of its tragic end, showing a depth of pure humanism such as even the classical Vishnuist poetry, because of its dependence on religion, was never able to achieve. In these folk-ballads, love is represented as a simple human relation which does not need any religious garb or veil, because it is a manifestation of human emotions, strong enough to help men and women to overcome even such obstacles as slander and prejudice. And I have no doubt that this conception is an expression of a folk-tradition, though it has been forgotten nowadays.

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[58] Cf. *Dhopār pāṭ*, XII. 21.

19. "Bāratīrther gān". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, III. 2., pp. 515-26. 156 verses. Collected by Biharilal Roy, no other data available.

This comparatively short ballad differs from the others especially in not comprising any erotic element, being a poetic story of how a pond was made.

Contents : King Bhāgadatta is asked by his old mother to take her to the twelve holy shrines. But she is in bad health and the king decides to establish a pond and to bring mud and water from the twelve shrines to fill up the pond. During his absence, his younger brother Rāmchandra rules the kingdom in a very just way, trying to keep the people happy and prosperous. After Bhāgadatta returns home, his subjects falsely accuse Rāmchandra of having tyrannized them. Rāmchandra curses them, saying they will die in hunger and suffering, because of their base ingratitude. Then an immense pond is built which the Hindus consider to be sacred.

Leaving Rāmchandra's episode aside, the ballad seems to be a plausible explanation of how a pond was established and it is rather difficult to understand why D. C. Sen does not want to 'attach any historical importance to it',[59] though he does not hesitate to do so in other cases much less plausible. The song has some interesting features. First of all, it is practically the only ballad in which the exact date of composition is given; in the concluding colophon, it is dated 1873 (in Bengali 1280 B.S.); it testifies to the fact that legendary ballads of this kind need not always be written shortly after the presumed happening, as D. C. Sen thinks (cf. *Kamalārāṇīr gān*).

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[59] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, III. 1., p. 375.

Besides we must mention the fact that the ballad was evidently composed by a Muslim and it is one of the rare cases in which Hindu religious customs are ridiculed and shamed. I think that the late date of the ballad explains it—in older ballads this religious bias is not to be found anywhere.

20. "Śīlādebī". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 47-70. 521 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De and sent in October, 1927.

This ballad is not preserved completely; but I do not think that the gaps, replaced by prose in one instance, are too large.

Contents : A poor Muṇḍa, comes from the jungles to a Brahmin Raja to ask for help in his poverty. The king gives him a good job, but the Muṇḍa works for five years without remuneration and then, instead of money, asks for the hand of the Raja's only daughter, the beautiful Śīlā. He is imprisoned, but succeeds in escaping and comes back with a band of Muṇḍas, who loot and burn the palace. The Raja has to flee, along with his daughter, and seek refuge with a neighbouring Raja. His son wants to marry Śīlā, being in love with her, but he has to kill the wicked Muṇḍa first; he really defeats the Muṇḍas and the marriage is being prepared.

But on the last day, the Muṇḍas who ran away, enter the town, disguised as musicians, and in a battle kill the Prince with a poisoned arrow. Śīlā dies, too, taking poison. Her father goes to Tripura, the king of which country sends a well-equipped army; all the Muṇḍas are imprisoned and executed.

D. C. Sen says, in his Preface, that a certain Gopalchandra Biswas heard another version of this song, a few years ago, and published a summary of it in the journal *Āratī;* unfortunately, the whole text of the song was no longer obtainable. Both versions are practically identical up to the escape of the king and Śīlā to the neighbouring Raja's. According to the lost version, Śīlā went with her father to a Muslim Gāzi and it was his son who fell in love with the Hindu girl. Her father had to flee, once more, and this time they went to the Raja of Tripura whose son, accompanied by Śīlā disguised as a man, led his army against the Muṇḍas; both of them were drowned, during a battle, in a river. The second campaign against the Muṇḍas was successful and all of them were killed in the same way as in the first version.

D. C. Sen thinks the lost version to be the original; our impression on which we have to rely here, as no historical proof is obtainable, confirms this view. Anyway, it is a good example of how even the plot of the folk-ballads changed, for reasons which are sometimes difficult to reconstruct.

It is interesting to note that practically all the main characters in the ballad are anonymous; neither Śīlā's father, nor his town, nor his neighbour, are named at all, which is unusual with the authors of folk-ballads.

The poet of the song was undoubtedly a skilled artist as is proved especially in his description of Śīlā's beauty

(II. 1-16). D. C. Sen may be right in ascribing portions like this to the stronger influence of art poetry on our ballad-maker.

21. "Rājā Raghur Pālā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 73-89. 201 verses. Collected by Nagendrachandra De in Mymensingh.

Contents : King Raghu mourns the death of his wife Kamalā. She asks him, in a dream, to build a cottage near her pond and keep their little son there so that she might come to give him milk. One night, the king hides near the cottage to see his beloved wife again, and when she is returning to the pond, he catches her and asks her to remain with him. But the queen disappears in the water, never to come again. The king dies of grief. After a few years, the mighty Īśā Khān is informed of the death of his great enemy, king Raghu, and comes with his army to defeat Susuṅga and take away Raghu's little son Raghunāth. The loyal subjects of the young Prince, the Gāros, decide to liberate their master, and during the night, they make a tunnel into Īśā Khān's Jangalbāri, secretly enter the town and take Raghunāth back home.

A confrontation of the ballad with history shows a strange mixture of historical fact and folk-poet's fancy. On the one hand, we know that king Raghu, his wife Kamalā and their son Raghunāth really lived in Susuṅga (today's Durgapur), where there still exists the pond called Kamalā-*dīghi*, connected with a legend ; with its contents we became acquainted in the ballad *Kamalā-rāṇīr gān*, with which the beginning of our present ballad corresponds. On the other hand, the famous chronicle *Āīn-i Ākbarī* informs us that king Raghunāth Singh paid a year's tribute to the Mughal Sultans in Delhi as a recompense for the military help he got when suppressing the revolt of his unloyal subjects from the Garo Hills. This information, the truth of which we have no reason to doubt, stands in sharp contrast with what we are told in the ballad about the love and loyalty of the Gāros towards their master Raghunāth.

The great Īśā Khān is depicted, in other ballads, as a real hero. It is interesting to note that here he is seen only as an enemy to the king Raghu and his son, and therefore described as a terrible monster. The bias against him is evident already in the story of our ballad; we must seriously doubt its historical truth, considering that Īśā Khān was one of the most powerful rulers of East Bengal and that, at the very beginning of his military career, his army consisted of more than 50 thousand men and his palace was strongly fortified and protected by powerful guns.

The comparison of the beginning of this ballad with the story of *Kamalārāṇīr gān* is interesting, too. It shows that, though the story is practically identical, there is not a single verse common to both ballads. Important, too, is the fact that each of them was collected by a different collector. Thus we can conclude that various legends, or historical events, must have been elaborated by various folk-poets independently and preserved by oral tradition, regardless of all differences of content and form.

22. "Mukuṭ Rāy". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā* IV. 2., pp. 133-54. 454 verses. Collected in Mymensingh, the name of the collector was omitted.

Contents: King Śilui has an only son, the handsome Mukuṭ; he wants him to marry and orders portraits of the most beautiful princesses from various countries to be brought, but the prince does not like any of them. The king sends him to find a bride for himself and he is free to choose, regardless of caste. In the deep jungle, Mukuṭ dismisses his escorts and following a parrot, finds a beautiful girl whom he had already seen in a dream, and because of whom he was unable to marry another princess. She is a princess, too, the daughter of wild hunters, and she falls in love with Mukuṭ. Together, they run away to the kingdom of Mukuṭ's father, where their marriage is to be celebrated. But an enemy kills Mukuṭ with a poisoned arrow, when the prince is alone with his bride, and she is accused of his murder, imprisoned with the body of the dead prince in a wooden chest and sent floating down the river. Fishermen rescue her and her lamentations move *Allah* to send a saint to the world who brings Mukuṭ back to life and sends Mukuṭ and the princess each to his home. Naturally they are sick with desire to be together again and the saint restores their happiness. He explains everything as a manifestation of *Allah's* power and kindness and converts all the participants of the story to Islam. In the conclusion, the adventures of another prince start to be retold, but only the beginning has been preserved.

The fairy-tale character of the ballad is clearly evident, but, as rightly stressed by D. C. Sen, its story must have undergone considerable changes. There is too much similarity with the Hindu (or perhaps even pre-Hindu) motif known, for instance, from *Manasā-maṇgal*—the motif of Behulā who succeeds in restoring the life of her husband, also killed by poison. D. C. Sen comments in this connection: "The story was evidently of Hindu or Buddhist origin and there is little doubt that in the shape in which we find it now, it has been remodelled and recast by some Mahomedan propagandist. There is, however, no atrocious element of attack on paganism in the story. But enough evidence is there to show that a Mahomedan propagandist latterly took up an old Hindu story with the object of singing the glory of Islam. The feats generally attributed to the *Siddhas* and *Munis* in local stories of this class have been metamorphosed into *keramats* or supernatural deeds of *Pirs* and *Paygambars*. Towards the end, the writer clearly declares his mission of propagation of the Muslim creed, which, he says, inspired him to take up the task in hand.''[60]

And it is necessary to add that the Muslim folk-poet did not use much originality in differentiating his ballad from other Hindu stories of this kind.

On the other hand, he shows real poetic mastery in the formal elaboration of his ballad, especially in similes and metaphors. There are portions here, *e.g.*, II. 107-10, III. 25-26 or II. 106, which are extremely expressive, ranking among the best passages in Mymensingh ballads.

As can be expected, there are also other moralistic maxims in the ballad, revealing the same tendency as the conclusion of the song, *i.e.*, the propagation of Islam. Unusually long is especially the portion III. 26-37.

Mukuṭ Rāy is the only example, in our collection, of a folk-ballad following a consciously religious Islamic tendency; in a way, it is a counterpart to Hindu compositions such as *Kenārāmer pālā*. But the purely balladic form of *Mukuṭ Rāy* and its love story show that it forms an integral part of the balladic literature from Mymensingh.

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[60] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, IV. 1., p. 87.

23. " Bhāraiyā Rājār Kāhinī ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 157-81. 522 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De with the help of Bijoy Nārāyaṇ Āchārya.

Contents : In Āmghoshāl, there lives the mighty and rich king Bhārai who has an only daughter, the beautiful Chāmpābatī. On the other bank of the river, there is a vast jungle which Bhārai orders to be cleared for cultivation. But this land is also claimed by the king Bīrsinha who comes with his army to seize it. Bhārai wins the battle, because of his magic power, Bīrsinha is imprisoned and his son, who comes with another army to help his father, shares the same fate. Bhārai is willing to let them free if the son of Bīrsinha, who belongs to a much higher caste, marries Chāmpā. Bīrsinha gives his promise, but no sooner is he out of the prison than he prepares another war against his neighbour. His son, leading the army instead of his father, is defeated by the angry Bhārai and is to be executed, but Chāmpā, who loves him, helps him to escape and the prince promises to marry her. In the meantime, Bīrsinha goes to Kāmākhya to learn magic from an old witch and in a new battle defeats Bhārai and turns him into stone. Bhārai's wife goes to remind Bīrsinha of his promise, but both herself and Chāmpā are insulted and turned out. The unhappy mother takes poison and her daughter loses her reason, out of grief over the prince's betrayal.

The ballad makes an impression of considerable antiquity. D. C. Sen hints at its probable connection with Tāntric beliefs and superstitions, which flourished in Bengal, especially from the 11th century. The repeated motif of magic as the decisive factor in the development of the story turns the ballad into a fairy-tale; and yet we cannot exclude the possibility of the story having a historical basis. Leaving aside all the magic contained in the ballad, it retells a story which is quite probable and realistic : how two Rajas fought for a piece of nobody's land, how one of them wanted to take advantage of his victory for the social rise of his family by the marriage of his daughter with his enemy's son, and how both himself and his daughter were deceived by the other king and his son.

The ballad is really beautiful, as far as its form is concerned. Its folk-author knew how to avoid verbosity and how to handle the traditional metaphors and similes; in epic portions, such as the beginning of the story, description of battles, etc., he does not use them at all, but concentrates them in parts with an emotional stress, in love dialouges and monologues and in lamentations. Moreover, he does not take them over mechanically, retaining only their basic elements and remodelling them in a characteristic stylization. Let us quote, in a literal translation, how Chāmpā's beauty is depicted :

"It is impossible to describe her beauty,/even the light of the lamp hides in darkness (seeing it).//The king's daughter is (like) a ray of the moon, he who has seen her won't forget,/the girl has bound clouds to her hair.//She has bound a full-moon to her face,/she has bound two stars to her eyes.//She has bound a pair of buds to her breast,/she has decorated her red lips with bright lightnings.//She has bound many stars to her sari;/seeing her beauty once, nobody will forget it" (V. 159-68).

Each of the similes used in this portion occurs frequently in other folk-songs, too ; but our poet turns them into metaphors by using the verb *bāndhā* (bind) which, however clumsy it may sound in a translation, is very effective in Bengali.

Let us add that, in other places, the folk-poet has created a few original metaphors which we have not come across in other ballads.

Metrically, too, the ballad avoids monotony by using not only the usual *payār*, but also other metrical schemes.

As in some other cases, the ballad, though comprising no Muslim elements at all, was obtained from Muslim singers. And it is rather significant for the solution of the problem of its authenticity that it was collected by two men, Chandrakumār De assisted in this case by a certain Bijoy Nārāyaṇ Āchārya.

24. " Āndhā Bandhu ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 185-207. 459 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De in March, 1930.

Contents : A handsome blind beggar comes to beg for alms, playing his flute so wonderfully that everybody is enchanted. He is seen by a princess who falls in love with him. Her father appoints the beggar to teach his daughter to play the flute. The princess confesses her love to the beggar, but he warns her, and after she is married to a young king, the blind man leaves the palace. Late at night, he comes to the city of the young king who has married the princess and his flute enchants everybody. The young queen, too, hears its voice and is unable to resist it any longer. She makes her husband promise that he will give the beggar anything he will be asked for, and then asks to be given herself. She follows the blind man, but he warns her again, not willing to take her along with him, and when he finds out that the princess cannot resist the voice of his flute, he throws it into river. But even then, the princess does not want to leave him and the blind beggar ends his life in the river, the princess following him in death.

The ballad has no outstanding qualities, its story being very sentimental and its verses literally overpacked with lamentations and confessions which are rather cheap in their appeal.

25. "Bagulār Bāromāsī". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 211-32. 423 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De in April, 1930.

According to its title, the ballad is a *Bāromāsī*, and actually its core is a song of twelve months, though provided with an introductory and a concluding part.

Contents : Bagulā whom a wicked Raja's son wants to marry, prefers a young merchant and gets married to him. After their marriage, the husband leaves on a business trip and the prince tries to seduce Bagulā through letters brought by a messenger or a dove. Bagulā loves her husband and rejects the prince's proposals and threats, but not openly, out of fear for her husband's life; therefore she always finds some excuse in order to gain time. One month passes after the other and in each of them, a letter comes from the prince followed by an evasive answer from Bagulā. At last Bagulā believes that her husband will never come back and she decides to leave her home with the prince and then make an end to her life. In her last letter she asks the prince to send her a palanquin. But this letter is intercepted by her sister-in-law, who locks Bagulā up at home and shows the letter to Bagulā's husband who has just returned from abroad. He is angry, of course, and takes Bagulā to a jungle, where he leaves her. She is found there by another prince who falls in love with her, but she thinks out a ruse to get rid of him and, at the same time, to get her husband back : she asks the prince to bring her a merchant's son whom she needs to complete a vow. Every merchant passing by on the river is caught by the prince's men and brought to Bagulā, but she rejects them all so long as the true one is not found—her own husband. Bagulā sends him a letter explaining everything and then both of them leave together for home.

The whole ballad is conceived in a very happy way and it has a lot of undeniable qualities, both in its contents and in its form. As mentioned above, its main part consists of a *Bāromāsī* comprising 185 verses out of a total of 423 ; it is preceded by an introduction necessary to explain all the circumstances, and by a conclusion presenting the solution to the whole story. Both these parts are epic in the true sense of the word, concentrating on the action itself and thus able to retain the listener's attention from the first moment to the last.

The individual cantos are constructed like acts in a drama and the connecting parts of the narrator are limited to a minimum. Thus the first canto is a dialogue between Bagulā and her future husband, the young merchant. Two verses are sufficient, then, to inform us that the girl really got married to him, followed by a monologue in which Bagulā takes leave of her husband and a short description of his departure. The *Bāromāsī* proper is introduced by the prince's first letter. Each month's part comprises a short description of nature or religious festivals, suitably connected with Bagulā's sorrows, then comes the letter of the prince, in two or four verses, and Bagulā's equally short answer. This ingenious scheme affords our poet ample opportunity to make full use of the traditional *Bāromāsī*-form as well as of his poetic art. After the *Bāromāsī* is concluded, the merchant returns home, Bagulā is driven out (in a mere two verses!) and left lamenting in the jungle, where she is found by the other prince, but thanks to her cleverness, she quickly finds her husband again.

This form based mainly on monologues and dialogues does not leave, of course, much space for the narrator. He does not describe his heroes and heroine at all and has to concentrate fully on the development of the story itself. The result is a ballad in which three elements, the lyrical, epic and dramatic, are distributed and represented equally.

26. "Bīrnārāyaner Pālā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā,* IV. 2., pp. 293-316. 523 verses. Collected by Nagendranath De in 1929.

Contents: *Bīrnārāyaṇ* the son of a Raja, falls asleep on the bank of a river and is seen by the beautiful Soṇā who remains with him till darkness falls; when returning home, she is attacked by a foreign merchant who carries her off aboard his ship. Bīr aroused by her cries for help, enters the ship secretly, kills the helmsman and steers the ship onto a shoal and succeeds in escaping with Soṇā. They return home together, but nobody believes his story and Bīr is accused of having seduced the girl. Both of them run away very far, into a wild jungle, but his father finds out everything and sends his men to bring Bīr back home. He is found, looking for food, and taken home by force. Soṇā waits for him in vain and finally decides to seek him.—This is the end of the torso.

The anonymous folk-author of the ballad was undoubtedly a skilled narrator; especially the story of the rescue of Soṇā from the ship of the foreign merchant reveals his talents in a very convincing manner. It is a pity that we are unable to draw other conclusions, as the ballad was not preserved in full.

27. "Ratan Ṭhākurer Pālā". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītika*, IV. 2., pp. 323-37. 252 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De, about 1931.

Contents: Ratan Ṭhākur's gardener has an only daughter who is very skilled in making flower-garlands. Ratan buys one of them and after learning who has made it, meets the girl. They fall in love with each other and run away together to Sajinta where they settle as gardeners. Ratan's parents send a courtesan to seduce their son and make him leave the gardener's daughter, which she succeeds in doing. The girl is then taken to the harem of the king of Sajinta, but she poisons herself. After some time, Ratan remembers his first love and returns, but it is too late. Mad with grief, he leaves never to return again.

There are certain lacunae in the text, for which the editor has substituted prose portions retelling the contents of the missing parts.

The qualities of the ballad can hardly be better evaluated than by D. C. Sen: "The exuberance of lyrical beauty of the ballad is its chief feature. There is a well-defined plot and the incidents are strung together with artistic skill; but the lyrical interest of the ballad predominates and is much greater than its dramatic quality."[61] This is right up to the last letter. By the method of constructing independent lyrical passages, the author succeeds in creating the atmosphere of a beautiful, but tragic love, which is doomed by the social inequality of the lovers.

28. "Pīr Bātāsī". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 341-64. 512 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De, about 1931.

Contents : Bināth, who lost his parents as a child, is brought up by the rich merchant Chānd, the father of the beautiful Sujanti, and goes with him on a business trip. In a storm, he is carried away by the river and found half-dead by the famous magician Sumāi Ojhā. Sumāi's foster-daughter Bātāsī falls in love with Bināth, who learns from Sumāi all his magic and snake-charming so well that he soon excells over his teacher. Sumāi wants to kill him, out of jealousy, and Bināth has to run away and return to Chānd, who marries him to his daughter Sujanti. But she is in love with another man and plots with Sumāi to deprive her husband of his magic powers. He has to run away again, finds Bātāsī, who has not forgotten him, and together they go to a distant jungle where they live in happiness. But a snake sent by Sumāi kills Bināth and even Sumāi is no more able to restore his life, as he has lost his magic powers by misusing them for money. The faithful Bātāsī follows the dead body of her husband into the waves of the river.

The ballad, as noted also by D. C. Sen, is not among the best examples of epic folk-poetry from

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[61] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, IV. 1., p. 241.

Mymensingh. Its story is not always logical and includes unintegrated episodes. The poet lacks the sense of proportion which we have found among some other folk-poets of ballads, nor does the way in which he uses the traditional metaphors and similes reveal a gifted poet. Especially his maxims and generalizations, for instance, in XII. 30-41, are verbose and dreary.

His name is given in two colophons, in the concluding one even with the name of his parents and his birth-place. He calls himself Rajanī Gopāl, he is a Hindu and, indeed, his composition does not comprise any Muslim element; but the introductory song (*bandanā*) is sung by a Muslim singer.

29. " Malayār Bāromāsī ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītika*, IV. 2., pp. 405-24. 432 verses. Collected in Mymensingh, no other data available.

The text of this ballad is very poorly preserved; its conclusion is missing altogether and in other parts there seem to be gaps and distortions.

Contents: The merchant Nītimādhab is looking for a bridegroom for his beautiful daughter Malayā, but she is abudcted by the robber Hārya and imprisoned in the jungle, until she is freed and married to Basanta, the son of king Bhūmā. But she is accused of having lost her chastity and unable to pass a difficult test, she has to return to the jungle again, where she waits for her husband who—as we may suppose—left for abroad. Then she meets a robber again, but the preserved torso only allows us to conclude that she was finally rescued by her husband.

In colophons, the authorship of the ballad is ascribed to Kaṅka, of whom we spoke when analyzing the ballad *Kaṅka o Līlā;* but it must be said that the verses do not reveal a great poet, which might, of course, be due to the bad state in which the song is preserved.

30. " Jīrālanī ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, IV. 2., pp. 427-51. 559 verses. Collected by Chandrakumār De.

Though comparatively long, this torso seems to have formed only a small part of a long fairy-tale.

Contents: The king Chakradhar catches a golden gazelle and gives him to his daughter Jīrālanī who, by chance, discovers that the gazelle is an enchanted prince; he has an amulet in his hair and when the amulet is removed, he assumes his human form again. Each night, the young couple love each other as human beings, in the daytime the prince lives as a gazelle. One night, however, the girl loses the amulet and the prince has to run away. Jīrālanī is to be married to her foster-brother, but rather than do so, she jumps into river. She is rescued by an old fisherman and then taken care of by a young merchant whom she asks to find the golden gazelle. The merchant's ships are wrecked and the rest of the story is not preserved.

Apart from the fact that the song is not complete, it is not a ballad in the proper sense of the word, but a fairy-tale in verse, for which reason we shall not make any further analysis of it.

31. " Soṇārāyer Janma ". *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā,* IV. 2., pp. 467-79. 280 verses. Collected by Chandrakumar De.

In the case of this torso, it would be difficult to reconstruct its contents, the song being very fragmentarily preserved. It deals with the story of how Soṇārāy was liberated from a prison.

Having exhausted all the ballads from Mymensingh to which the name *gītikā* can be applied, let us add a few words on the rest of the samples from Mymensingh comprised in D. C. Sen's collection.

First of all, there is a group of five *prosometric* stories (*i.e.*, stories in which verse alternates with prose portions): *Kājalrekhā* (I. 2, pp. 315-47), *Kānchanmālā* (II. 2; pp. 81-120), *Madankumār o Madhumālā* (II. 2, pp. 277-310), *Sannamālā* (IV. 2, pp. 273-90) and *Rājā Tilak Basanta* (IV. 2, pp. 367-401). All of them are more or less fairy-tales, but they have one thing in common with the *gītikās*: a rather strong love element frequently predominating over the other components. Only one of the tales, *Sannamālā*, tells a story practically identical with any of those of our ballads; but unfortunately, this tale is preserved in an incomplete torso.

In all these tales, there is no rigid border-line between the prose and verse sections; sometimes the prose retells what has been said in verse already, and *vice versa*, sometimes we find epic narrative in verse, but generally, lyrical parts are told in verse and epic development of the story is in prose. If we compare these tales with those retold by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, in his famous collections *Ṭhākurmār jhuli* and *Ṭhākurdādār jhuli*, we must note that in D. C. Sen's edition, verses are far more numerous than the prose portions.

For obvious reasons, we shall not analyze these prosometric stories in more detail, but we shall make use of their verse portions later on, when dealing with the metaphors and similes of Mymensingh epic folk-poetry.

The rest of the songs published in D. C. Sen's edition do not come with the scope of the present study, either as not being folk-ballads at all (*Dasyu Kenārāmer pālā* and a torso of *Rāmāyaṇ* by *Chandrāvatī*, and *Gopinī kīrtan* by Sulakshaṇā, which is a version of the Krishṇa-legend), or because they were collected in other districts than Mymensingh, such as Chittagong (*Nizām Dākāiter pālā*, *Kāphen chorā*, *Bheluyā*, *Hāti-khedār gān*, *Kamal Sadāgar*, *Sujā-tanayār bilāp*, *Nachhar Mālum*, *Nūrannehā o kabarer kathā* and *Paribānur hānhālā*), Faridpur (*Śānti* and *Nīlā*), Sylhet (*Surat Jāmāl o Adhuyā and Sonābibir pālā*), Noakhali (*Chaudhurīr laṛāi*), Rangpur (*Mahīpāler gān*) and Birbhum (*Sāntāl hāngāmār chhaḍā*).

III. COMMON FEATURES OF THE BALLADS

Apart from many differences occurring in the Mymensingh ballads due to the individuality of various folk-poets, which have not been completely effaced in the course of oral tradition, they also contain many features in common; as these man be considered characteristics of the specific *genre*, it will be advisable to list them here and analyze them in more detail.

1. *Ideological and artistic approach of the ballad-writers*

Considering the fact that our ballads were composed for the country people and by the members of village communities, it is not surprising to find that they reflect, to a large extent, the psychological and ideological approach of the people towards various phenomena of life and reality. I do not think, however, that we can rightly speak of their class-consciousness in the sense in which, for instance, we use this term when analyzing modern literature. Class-consciousness means preferring class interests to any other and considering class relations as a primary factor in human society; it requires a considerable understanding of the development of society, a broad mental outlook and the ability to generalize practical experience. We can hardly expect to find all this among our folk-poets from Mymensingh, nor do we find it in any folk-poetry.

Nevertheless, the world in which our folk-balladists live is divided into the wealthy and the poor and this fact does find its reflection in their ballads, too. As we have shown already, their creations are, first of all, *ballads of love*; but the individual stories are based, in many cases, on social conflicts deriving from the inequality prevailing in this society. The very fact that they are, with few exceptions, *tragic* stories is very significant; unhappy love need not be caused here, as in other nations' folk-literature, by differences of wealth only, but also by the barriers of caste and religious prejudice so typical of Indian life. And our balladists make full use of all these motifs which do not appear at all in pre-modern Bengali literature.

This striking difference may be due to various reasons. D. C. Sen is probably right in suggesting, in his English Prefaces, the tradition of free love prevailing in East Bengal as a feasible explanation. Surveying the history of Mymensingh, and especially of its eastern part in which most of our ballads originated, we can easily understand that the rigid caste system of Hinduism, with its strict prohibitions, had not had time enough to get deeply rooted here and that its impact on the life of the country people must have been weaker than in other parts of India.[62] Before it was able to displace the old Buddhism with the surviving remnants of even older folk-beliefs, the mighty wave of Islam invaded the country, turning the majority of its inhabitants into Muslims. By the way, it is really surprising to see how easily these people changed their religion, from Buddhism to Hinduism and from Hinduism to Islam. We may perhaps take it as the indication of a rather slack adherence of the broad masses to religion, to which they may have preferred their own traditions of greater freedom both of thought and in matters of social intercourse.

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[62] *Cf.* Kedarnath Majumdar, *Maimansiṃher itihās* (The History of Mymensingh). Sanyal & Co., Calcutta, 1906, pp. 199-200.

I think, however, that this reason alone would not account for the difference between the classical and the folk-literature, mentioned above. Why did vernacular traditions not find expression in classical Bengali poetry, too? The reason must be looked for in the sphere of aesthetics ; classical Bengali literature kept rather closely to the patterns of classical Sanskrit poetry whereas folk-poetry was not bound so much by these conventions. A. L. Basham summed up classical Sanskrit poetry in this respect very well : "The poets lived in a comparatively static society, and their lives were controlled in detail by a body of social custom which was already ancient and which had the sanction of religion behind it. They were never in revolt against the social system, and Indian Shelleys and Swinburnes are lacking. Most of this literature was written by men well integrated in their society and with few of the complex psychological difficulties of the modern literary man; hence the spiritual anguish of a Cowper, the heart-searchings of a Donne, and the social pessimism of an early T. S. Eliot, are almost entirely absent. Despite its reputation for pessimism in the West, Hindu thought and literature is fundamentally optimistic, and the tragic drama, or the story with an unhappy ending, was not looked on with favour."[63]

In the Mymensingh ballads, we see an exactly contrary tendency—an outspoken preference for love tragedies, which were not excluded from the list of permitted subjects by any aesthetic canon, as they were in the classical poetry. The classical poets simply do not allow their heroes and heroines to fall in love with unequal partners ; in folk-ballads it happens very often.

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[63] A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, London, 1954, p. 416.

Indeed, unequal love ending in tragedy is one of the *leitmotifs* of the Mymensingh ballads.

As stated above, this inequality is due either to social or to caste differences of the couple in question; thus Naderchānd is a rich Zamindar and Mahuyā is supposed to be a Gypsy girl; Rūpavatī is a Raja's daughter and Madan a poor servant; Dulāl is a Dewan's son and Madinā a simple village girl; Kāñchanmālā, the washerman's daughter, is in love with a Prince; the blind beggar is loved by a Princess, Ratan Ṭhākur by a gardener's daughter, the rich Śyām Rāy falls in love with a Ḍom woman, etc.

This does not mean, of course, that the tragic ending of the Mymensingh ballads is always motivated by such an inequality, but the number of such cases is certainly striking. It is large enough to testify to the fact that the balladists did not fail to discover in this motif a rich source of stories able to move their audiences, which is undoubtedly one of the chief aims of folk-literature everywhere.

It would be very interesting to find out to what extent these stories are based on real happenings. Unfortunately, in all Mymensingh ballads, elements of reality are inseparably mingled with the creations of poetic fancy and we shall never be able to separate the two. We know, of course, that many songs have been composed which recorded, in a poetic form, actual happenings; but especially in our ballads of love, we can never designate with certainty any story as a true replica of reality. The ballad *Rūpavatī*, extant in two versions, is an eloquent testimony to this fact.

However it may be, we are certainly entitled to state that the stories of the Mymensingh ballads are more realistic than those of the classical Bengali poetry.

The very fact that they have brought their literary creations from the religious sphere into human society, from among the gods amidst men, is a significant achievement; and we must not forget that the folk-balladists did so earlier than the first representatives of Bengali art literature, which showed in this respect a time-lag lasting until the advent of the modern period.

On the other hand, however, it would be wrong to look, in these ballads, for a true reflection of real life. It is simply not their aim which, in literature of this kind generally, is intended to entertain the country people by stories as interesting as possible in content and cast in a favourite poetic form. The inventory of plots preserved in our ballads enables us to understand what the country people found most interesting : stories of romantic, unhappy love, adventures of beautiful, brave and devoted girls and wives fighting against an unpropitious fate and wicked men, tales of treason and intrigues of the usually mighty and wealthy against the weaker and poorer, but always morally superior, etc. These motives appear again and again in the *gītikās*, in many variants.

I consider it one of the most admirable qualities in the Mymensingh balladists that they rarely yield to the temptation of letting their heroines and heroes win the unequal fight with their powerful enemies. There are stories with such endings, but they belong to another *genre* of folk-literature—to the fairy-tales. Our *gītikās* differ from them considerably, introducing supernatural elements only very seldom and being careful to avoid anything which could not happen in real life. And as if anxious to differ from the *rūpakathās* and *kissās* also in form, the ballads nearly always use verses throughout, not being interspersed with prose-portions as are

Bengali fairy-tales, as we know them both from a few samples in D. C. Sen's editions and from the beautiful collections of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar. Let me remind the reader of another vast species of literature in which stories of unequal love with happy-ends occur very frequently—of those cheap and worthless novels, immensely popular with masses everywhere in the world, in which poor and honest girls get married, in spite of all obstacles, to millionaires' sons and in which evil—or what is considered by the authors to be evil—is always defeated by good. How greatly to the credit of the Bengali folk-balladists is it not to corrupt the taste of the country people with such stupid nonsense!

The approach of the Mymensingh balladists to these subjects is undoubtedly much more realistic. The basic idea was expressed by one of them, the folk-author of *Dhopār pāṭ*, very clearly : "Love between a big (man) and a small (woman) is impossible"[64] (III. 16). And yet two other folk-poets from Mymensingh—by the way, one Muslim and one Hindu—summed up what seems to be a traditional idea in this region, fully accounting for the popularity of these subjects ; in *Mānjurmā* we read : "Love is care, love is a jewel, love is a necklace ; he who dies in love has not lived in vain" (V. 69-72) ; and again, in *Śyām Rāyer pālā* : Nitāi Chānd says : "You need not be afraid of death; when one heart merges with another, there is no re-birth" (X. 69-70).

It is not surprising to find on whose side the sympathies of our folk-poets are enlisted in nearly all these stories. Wherever inequality appears, typical as it is for the majority of Mymensingh ballads, the poets instinctively shield the weaker partner and side with him. In most cases, it is naturally the woman or the girl who needs this moral support of the narrator; but we have ample proof of the fact that it is her weakness and not her sex as such which evokes their sympathy. Let us take, as an instance, the ballad *Maluyā*. It consists of two parts, in the first of which the weaker partner is not Maluyā, who is a rich farmer's daughter, but Chānd Binod; and he is the real hero of this first part. But as soon as Chānd gets rich and marries Maluyā, she becomes the weaker of the two, an innocent victim of caste prejudice, and, at the same time, the heroine of the ballad. The same is true of the ballad *Dewānā Madinā*. In its first part, our sympathies go out to the brothers Ā́lāl and Dulāl, who have to fight hard for a bare living; but after they win back their previous position and wealth, they lose all the sympathies of the narrator who concentrates fully on the poor and abandoned Madinā.

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[64] *Cf.* also *Śyām Rāyer pālā*, III. 4.

We must, however, mention also the only two exceptions to this general tendency of the Mymensingh ballads. They are the songs *Bāratīrther gān* and *Rājā Raghur pālā*. The heroes of both these compositions belong to the upper classes and, in the former case, the poet is literally biassed against the people, the subjects who by their slander hurt the king's just and righteous brother. But it is rather significant that neither of these two ballads is a ballad of love, like the majority of the other songs, but a kind of genealogical composition, 'explaining' the rise of certain famous ponds. And it is quite possible that such songs may well have been directly ordered by the owners or, at least, composed to please wealthy patrons.

So far we have noticed only those in whose favour our ballads speak. But we must not overlook *against* whom they are directed, whom they ridicule or morally condemn.

In this respect, the true folk-character of the overwhelming majority of ballads is even more apparent. Taking one ballad after the other and considering their various characters, including the episodic ones, we have to list, on the negative side, a number of persons who must have been looked upon, by the village people, as their natural enemies : the mighty Rajas as well as the even mightier representatives of Muslim power, from the local Kazis up to the Dewans and Nawabs, the Zamindars as well as their agents, spies of Muslim rulers, village usurers, etc. On the other hand, many of the ballads condemn the orthodox Hindu caste order, revealing it and its countless prejudices to be the real cause of many tragedies. But even such authorities as village Brahmins, astrologers and hermits are not taboo, being often mercilessly criticised or ridiculed, whether by Hindus or Muslims.

It is significant that it is not among these authorities that our ballads sometimes look for opponents able to defeat even the mighty rulers, but above all among the merchant class, who often represent a heroic stratum of Bengali village society. Let us remember that this is also a trait in classical Bengali epic poetry, especially in the autochthonous *Mańgal-kāvyas.* Considering the somewhat exceptional position occupied by merchants in Bengali society of the late middle ages, we are not surprised to find that in literature their profession is glorified and held in high esteem. They were the link connecting the Bengali villages with the distant world, their adventurous journeys taking them to far-away coasts, from which they returned with ships loaded with valuable goods and with interesting news and stories. No wonder that, under these circumstances, they had such an attraction for both art- and folk-poets.

Whatever subject the Mymensingh balladists choose and whatever story they tell, their *artistic approach* reveals a wide range of poetic methods and techniques. On the one hand, there are poets whose ballads are richly interspersed with lyrical elements, but the majority concentrate more on the plot of their stories, being more economical in their use of lyrical descriptions, reflections, etc. ; in general, we may say that the epic and lyrical elements of the Mymensingh ballads are well balanced and that the folk-poets know how to avoid static, lengthy and wearisome passages better than their classical colleagues. On the other hand, an analysis of individual ballads has shown that their folk-authors are far from being uniform in their approach to the actual story. Some poets never abandon the pose of an impartial narrator, who simply tells his story, not criticizing its characters nor commenting upon their deeds and motives. There are, however, also less restrained balladists, who do not hesitate to reveal their sympathies and personal opinions in various ways by providing the individual characters with qualitative attributes (good, righteous, bad, wicked, etc.), by inserting reflections and poetic extempore, either in colophons bearing the poet's name or at some point in the ballad, by appealing to the listeners' feelings or by trying to generalize the moral pointed by the story in the form of a proverb or maxim.

It would be wrong, however, to see in these various artistic approaches, personal contributions of the individual poets. From the comparatively large number in which each of them appears, in various ballads, it is evident that these approaches represent but different poetic techniques and methods worked out by generations of folk-authors of the *gītikās* in the course of their centuries-long development; the individual poets only select from the many possibilities offered by the achievements of previous balladists, refining the method in question according to their own poetic abilities. But it must be stressed that the range of these methods is wide enough to give ample scope to the poet's individuality and to enable him to unfold his personal gifts and reveal his personal inclinations and likings.

2. *Mymensingh ballads—a mixture of Hindu and Muslim elements*

Though secular in character, there are enough religious elements in the ballads from Mymensingh, as is quite natural in the Indian context. But with very few exceptions, religion plays only a secondary role in these compositions. Actually, there are only three ballads (besides *Dākāt Kenārāmer pālā* by *Chandrāvatī*, which I have excluded from my analysis) in which a religious tendency is more or less obvious—the Muslim ballad *Mukuṭ Rāy* and the Hindu songs *Kaṅka o Līlā* and *Chandrāvatī*.

In *Mukuṭ Rāy*, the propagandist aim is quite obvious, especially in the conclusion of the ballad and the maxims attached to it. But as shown already by D. C. Sen, the story itself is most probably Hindu, if not pre-Hindu, and the present ballad is a Muslim elaboration of an older folk-story. In both *Chandrāvatī* and *Kaṅka o Līlā* the religious propaganda is more subtle, religious motifs appearing as structural units on which to build an interesting love story. In any case, religious motivation is certainly not one of the characteristic features of the Mymensingh ballads.

Similarly rare are direct attacks on one of the two main religions of the Mymensingh population on behalf of the opposite side. Islam as such is not attacked by the Hindu folk-poets in any single case and Hinduism becomes the target of one Muslim balladist only, the author of the *Bāratīrther gān*. But we have shown already, in the preceding chapter, how exceptional this ballad is from another point of view, and thus its anti-Hindu tendency cannot be taken to be typical of this literary *genre*.

There are, of course, many cases of criticism or ridicule pointed against what we consider to be a part of Hinduism or against persons in whom we see representatives of Hinduism ; the greedy village priest Bhāṭuk in *Dewān Bhābnā*, the irascible Brahmin Garga and the slanderous Brahmin community in *Kaṅka o Līlā*, the lecherous hermit in *Mahuyā*, the ludicrous astrologers in *Rūpavatī*, etc. It is, however, very doubtful whether our folk-poets and their audience look at them as representatives of Hinduism—more probably they are criticised and attacked from the same point of view as, in other ballads, the wicked Kazis or lustful Dewans, *i.e.*, for their human faults and defects. For it is significant that all the ballads mentioned above were composed most probably by Hindu poets.

Neither can we consider as expressions of religious bias those portions of ballads, such as *Maluyā* or *Malayār bāromāsī*, in which caste prejudice is mainly to blame as the cause of the love tragedy. *Maluyā* is an eloquent testimony to this fact ; its criticism is pointed against both the caste prejudices of the orthodox

Hindu community and against the Muslim Kazi and Dewan. Besides there is no ground to attribute these ballads to Muslim poets. They are simply criticism of Hindu shortcomings by Hindu balladists—nothing more.

There occur ballads, in D. C. Sen's edition, dealing exclusively with Hindu subjects and characters (e.g. *Mahuyā*, *Dhopār pāṭ*, *Māniktārā*, *Śyām Rāyer pālā*, etc.), and there are others, dealing with the Muslim community, in which not a single Hindu appears (e.g. *Dewānā Madinā*, *Firoz Khān Dewān*, *Āynā Bibi*, etc.). But the majority of the ballads reflect the Mymensingh society as it has been constituted during the last few centuries, *i.e.*, as a mixed Hindu-Muslim society. It should also be noted that some of the exclusively 'Hindu' ballads bear, in their colophons, names of Muslim poets or are provided with Muslim introductory songs. We know also, from the testimony of Chandrakumar De and others, that even such ballads were equally enjoyed by the members of both religious communities. Thus it is evident that *gītikās* were the common property of both Hindus and Muslims and that there was no border-line dividing these ballads into Hindu and Muslim.[65]

Taking the Mymensingh ballads as a whole, we are fully justified in regarding them as a harmonious mixture of Hindu and Muslim culture. It would be useless to repeat what D. C. Sen has said many times on this point and with much emphasis, confronting the unhappy modern state of affairs and relations between Hindus and Muslims with the spirit of broad religious tolerance permeating the ballads. He is probably right, too, in stating that it was Muslim singers who rescued the Mymensingh ballads, in later centuries: "As the purists of Brahmanistic renaissance gradually imposed more and more stringent rules in regard to social morals, some of the finest of ballads breathing a refreshing air of freedom were condemned as unholy, and Mahua, Kamala, Kajal Rekha, Bhelua and many other ballads of great poetic beauty and charm bore the ban of Brahminic canons and were expelled from Hindu homes. We owe their existence to Mahomedan 'Gayans' who did not set a pin's fee at the angry look of the Brahmins."[66]

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[65] Though there are, in present-day Mymensingh, certain kinds of lyrical folk-songs which are not shared by both communities, such as the Muslim *jāri-gān* or the Hindu *kīrtan*, the majority are common property, e.g. *sāri-gān*, and especially the *meyelī-gān*, which are sung by Hindu as well as Muslim women during the wedding ceremonies, though they contain countless allusions to the Kṛishṇa-Rādhā legend.

D. C. Sen also quotes a few verses from the various introductory hymns (*bandanā*) of the ballads in which the singers pay homage to both Allah and Hindu gods and goddesses, to Mecca as well as to Brindaban and Gaya; the reader will find them, for instance, in *Mahuyā* and in *Pīr Bātāsī*. Also some colophons have the same tendency of tolerance and respect for both religions.

It is fortunate that the only ballad mentioned above which is void of this spirit of religious tolerance, *Bāratīrther gān*, is provided with the exact year of composition. It was composed in 1873, which is comparatively late, and represents a period in which tolerance was receding into the background and giving way to less happy relations between Hindus and Muslims. It is an indication that the origin of these more tolerant stories is to be looked for in the more remote past.

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[66] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, IV. 1., p. xxviii.

What is, however, most important, from the point of view of the present chapter, is the way in which the Mymensingh folk-ballads have become a uniform product of both the Hindu and Muslim cultural and ideological elements, constituting a literary phenomenon which is no longer either Hindu or Muslim, but unites both in a harmonious way. The ballad *Mānjurmā* is a good instance and D. C. Sen was very right when saying: "The characters are all Mahomedan, but the whole poem is closely permeated by Hindu thought, showing beyond doubt that a catholic spirit of assimilation of mutual ideas and a warm sympathy subsisted between the Hindus and the Moslems when this ballad was composed."[67] And this is neither the only nor the most eloquent instance. Let us remember the ballad *Āynā Bibi*, with its accusation of its Muslim heroine by the Muslim community of being *asatī*, or *Mukuṭ Rāy*, the Hindu or pre-Hindu story of which was very suitable for the Muslim propagandist's purpose of recasting it as a 'Muslim' ballad. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the frequent anti-caste tendency or, at least, the criticism of the orthodox caste system, expressed in many 'Hindu' ballads may be due to the deep influence of Muslim ideology and the more democratic organization of Muslim society. Unlike in so many parts of India, the members of the Hindu community in Mymensingh have had Muslims as their close neighbours, and the example of a casteless society must have been attractive even for those who did not abandon their old religion for the sake of Islam.

But the Mymensingh ballads do not offer us enough materials for the study of the interactions of Hinduism and Islam; this problem will have to be dealt with on the basis of more materials and in broader outlines. For our purpose it is sufficient to repeat that the Mymensingh ballads are neither products of Hindu nor Muslim culture, but of a *single Bengali folk-culture.*

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[67] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, III. 1., p. 3.

3. *Singers of the ballads*

In folk-poetry generally, the singer is an important figure. He is not a mere interpreter of the fixed literary text, but an active co-creator with a greater or smaller share in moulding and modifying the work in the process of interpretation. Sometimes, as in fairy-tales or the Bengali 'long songs', the singer's or the narrator's contribution is basic because he is given little more than the subject or the contents of the story, and it is left to him, in his extempore recital, to cast it in a certain form. In other cases—and these include our ballads—the singer learns the verses by heart, but even here, as will be shown later, he does not accept the folk-poet's composition as an unchangeable text, which must be reproduced exactly as it was composed. In any case, modern folk-lore research stresses the importance of the singer and requires as much attention to be paid to him as possible.

From this point of view, it is a pity that the information on the singers of the individual ballads, conveyed by the collectors and published by D. C. Sen, is so scanty. Only fifteen ballads from Mymensingh are provided with the names of the singers who sang them, and even here their profession is not always given, not to speak of such data as age, caste, education, etc. Nowhere are we told from whom the singer learned his ballad or part of it. Thus our notes, too, are perforce more fragmentary than we could wish.

D. C. Sen says: "These ballads are sung in the district of Mymensingh generally by Muhammadans and low-caste Hindus—those belonging to the Namasūdra, the Hāḍi, the Ḍom, the Jelē (fishermen), the Pāṭni (boatmen) and other depressed castes. As a rule, they are illiterate, their chief occupation is agriculture with other humble avocations in which they are engaged in the day-time. At night they assemble in some neighbour's house as invited guests to sing the songs. Most of them are amateur parties. There are some, however, who have made the singing of the ballads their occupation."[68]

From the scanty data given in the Prefaces to the individual ballads, we gather that perhaps only three ballads, or their main parts, were collected from professional singers: the main portion of *Maluyā* "was obtained from one Pashani Bewa, a professional singer, reputed for her wonderful memory",[69] the ballad *Pīr Bātāsī* from three minstrels, Brindāban Bairāgī, Śridām Pāṭani and Jagabandhu Gāyen, and the ballad *Śyām Rāyer pālā* from different persons, among whom two seem to have been professionals—Manmohan Sadhu, who is said to have "a note-book which contained a number of songs", and Kamal Das Bairāgī from Gupta Brindāban, "a minstrel whose avocation is to sing old ballads tuned to the music of the one-stringed instrument called the Ektara" and who is "a veritable ocean of old ballads".[70] The remaining singers, so far as their names are given at all, are either not described, or are

[68] *Eastern Bengal Ballads (Mymensingh Ballads)*, I. 1., p. xci.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[70] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, III. 1., p. 199.

said to belong to various professions : farmers (a part of *Mahuyā*), milkmen (a part of *Dhopār pāṭ*), boatmen (a part of *Dewān Bhābnā* and of *Śilā Debī*), Vaishnav mendicants (parts of *Bhāraiyā rājā* and *Āndhā bandhu*), beggars (a part of *Firoz Khān Dewān*), cart-drivers and jute merchants (parts of *Maishāl bandhu*). *Kamalā* is said to have been obtained from some women. It is interesting to read that the ploughman from whom a part of *Mahuyā* was collected, was singing the ballad 'while engaged in field-work',[71] and that the boatmen sang the ballad *Dewān Bhābnā* 'in chorus at boat races'.[72]

In the first chapter of the present study, I have connected the disappearance of the Mymensingh ballads, in modern times, with the decline of professional singers and their groups. I think that what we learn of the singers from D. C. Sen's scattered notes only confirms this opinion. Undoubtedly professional groups did not earn their livelihood by singing torsos or parts of ballads; they would hardly be paid for that. These groups, as confirmed also by Chandrakumar De,[73] had a monopoly ownership of the individual ballads, guarding them jealously ; as testified to by the note on Manmohan Sadhu and his note-book, mentioned above, it is even probable that some of the more notable singers kept written records of their ballads. The amateurs were, under these circumstances, able to learn only parts of the songs, which would account for the fact that nearly all ballads had to be collected from different individuals and that, in many cases, only torsos were obtained, the search for the rest having proved fruitless. Significant, in this context, is the information obtained from Chandrakumar De : "It is said that there still is a party of *professional* singers at Mashka, who sing Mahuya",[74] which can be confronted with the following words of the collector : "It is a great inconvenience that one individual singer is scarcely found in this district who knows a whole poem. It is to be recovered from various persons living in widely distant places, so that a long journey is required to get hold of a whole poem. . . ."[75] And the disappearance of the ballads, resulting from the steady decline in public favour, is testified to among professional singers, too, by Chandrakumar De : "Chandrakumar says that these songs are losing public favour every day. Even a hundredth part of what was seen twenty years ago does not exist to-day. In every village, there were singers, and in fact, Mymensingh was a veritable nest of singing birds in those days. 'It is difficult', writes Chandrakumar, 'to get one singer in ten or fifteen villages now-a-days, and if by chance you meet one he will sing five or six songs and then stop, saying that he does not remember the rest. His memory needs be rusty, when his songs have run out of fashion and his services are not required even once a year'."[76]

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[71] *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (*Mymensingh Ballads*), I. 1., p. vi.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

[73] *Saurabh*, Vol. 2, No. 7, pp. 212-18.

We can hardly add anything to the description of the actual performance of the ballads as given by D. C. Sen : "The minstrel or the chief singer is called the Gayen. He is the main singer, adding interpretations and bringing out the hidden meaning of the poetical ideas, assisted by a chorus of eight or ten men who are called 'Paile' (probably derived from the word

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[74] *Eastern Bengal Ballads (Mymensingh Ballads)*, I. 1., p. vi.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. xix.
[76] *Ibid.*, pp. xciii-xciv.

pālā-gāyak. They play on cymbals, tabors, and violins in course of singing. The harmonium is now and then seen amongst the musical instruments, which is of course a modern innovation. Sometimes, young lads are introduced attired in picturesque dresses who sing and dance by way of diversion.[77] The professional singers charge Rupees five to Rupees ten per night. Sometimes they do not fix any remuneration but depend on the gifts doled out by an appreciative audience. This is called *pela* in this part of Bengal and in Mymensingh they call it *fira*. These gifts vary from As. 2 to As. 4 per head amongst the rural audience. The amateur parties, of course, do not charge anything, satisfied with betels and tobacco, which are freely offered by the host.”[78]

A characteristic feature of the ballads is that they were composed to be sung and listened to, not to be read. Thus folk-poets when composing these songs presumed a certain technique as regards their performance, for instance, a group of singers who will sing certain parts, thus differentiating for the audience the speaker of individual verses. This would account for the uncertainty with which the edited text is sometimes read and for the difficulty of the reader to orient himself as to the person who is speaking different parts.

A careful study of the ballads reveals that their authors always kept their future interpreters in mind and helped them to maintain the necessary contact with the listeners. They did so, first of all, by very frequent

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[77] By this, D. C. Sen means probably the so-called *ghāṭu*, handsome boys disguised as girls, who are to be seen here and there, in Mymensingh, even nowadays singing the *ghāṭu-gān* or playing female characters in the village theatrical performances (*yātrā*).

[78] *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (*Mymensingh Ballads*), I. 1., pp. xci-xcii.

narrator's phrases which are basically of two types : the singer either asks for the audience's attention by inserting *śuno diyā man* (listen attentively) or *śuno bibaraṇ* (listen to the description), or he inserts a typical narratory turn *kon kām kare* (*karila*) "what does (did) he (she) do". The latter is to be met with also in classical Bengali epics which, after all, were also meant to be listened to; but in the folk-ballads, its frequency is higher. Thus in *Kamalā*, it is to be found fourteen times, in *Maluyā* twenty times, and in *Bhāraiyā rājā* as often as twenty-two times in 522 verses. These phrases are subject to variation and some poets or singers change their wording; but the majority use them in the stereotype form given above.

Another interesting testimony to the consideration of the folk-poet for the singer of his ballad is to be found in *Gopinī kīrtan* which we have excluded from our analysis, as not being a proper ballad, but which certainly can be quoted in this context. The author of the song, Sulā, twice interrupts her narration to insert an appeal to the master of the house to give a reward to the singer for his performance : "I bow to the feet of the master with folded hands, let the singer, in this moment, get (new) clothes" (XIII. 37-38), and again : "Sulā bows to the feet of the master with folded hands, let the singer, at his departure, get a pitcher" (XIX. 29-30).

On the other hand, however, we can hardly be sure that these verses were not inserted into the poem by the singer himself, in spite of the fact that the name of the poetess Sulā is connected with the entreaty. Another case of a similar character, in which we are unable to decide whether it was composed by the poet or inserted by a singer, is to be found in *Mukuṭ Rāy* ; in its third canto, v. 18-19, the principal singer addresses his chorus to change the refrain (*diśā*), in the middle of the narrative.

If the authorship of these portions is uncertain, there are others which are clearly the singers' own additions. They are also of various characters. The most frequent are the introductory songs (*bandanā*) and additional verses concluding the ballads. As a good instance of the latter, the conclusion of the balled *Firoz Khān Dewān* may be quoted, consisting of 20 verses. The singer promises to come again, the next year, with a new song, if he is still alive, begs the audience's pardon for the shortcomings of his performance, praises the host, hinting at the reward which the singer will get (clothes and rice), and invokes Allah's blessings on the host and the audience. It is very probable that portions like this were quite common in the Mymensingh ballads, though, for obvious reasons, the collectors did not record them or D. C. Sen excluded them from his edition. They are in full accord with the singer's aim, to get a rich reward for his song. A close analogy may be quoted from China, where narrators of folk-stories often interrupted their narrations at the most thrilling moments, to make the audience pay as much as possible.[79] In the ballad *Bheluyā*, we find, in a foot-note, ten verses with which the singer interrupted his recital, asking for betel and jokingly chiding his host for avarice.[80]

Though not all the ballads in D. C. Sen's edition are provided with introductory songs, we may consider them to form essential parts not only of these *gītikās*, but also, as is testified to by today's practice, of other types of folk-literature, such as 'long songs', fairy-tales, *yātrās*, etc. It has become a habit, in Mymensingh as well as elsewhere in Eastern Bengal, to begin a public performance with a sort of introduction containing religious as well as secular elements. Out of twelve *bandanās*, recorded in the present collection, five invoke Hindu gods, shrines, etc., two are of Muslim religious character, those of *Mahuyā* and *Pīr Bātāsī* tolerantly mingle both Hindu and Muslim elements and the remaining three are completely secular, asking for the host's gifts and the audience's patience. One case, however, deserves special attention ; it is the ballad *Kaṅka o Līlā*, which is provided with three different *bandanās* in all. Two of them go under the names of Dāmodar Dās and Nayān Chānd, who are mentioned as the authors of this ballad several times throughout the poem ; the third *bandanā*, secular in character, is the composition of a singer calling himself Śibu Gāyen. It would seem, from this instance, that *bandanās* may have been composed not only by singers, but also by the folk-balladists themselves. We have mentioned, however, how vague and uncertain is the authorship of the colophons bearing different poets' names, and D. C. Sen confirms this opinion, too.[81] In any case, terms and phrases used in *bandanās* have become so stereotype and are so void of any individuality that they must be considered the product of a long tradition and not creations of individual poets.

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[79] I am indebted for this information to J. Prusek who has paid much attention to Chinese folk-literature and the technique of narrators in his numerous articles, prefaces and in the book *Literature osvobozené Číny* (The Literature of Liberated China and its Folk-Traditions, Praha, 1953) (available also in a German translation, Praha, 1955).

[80] *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., p. 191; *cf.* also *ibid.*, p. 52.

One other point must be noted before we conclude this chapter. It is almost certain that the 'original' folk-authors of our ballads, *i.e.*, those who gave the respective stories the form of *gītikās*, were singers, too.

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[81] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, II. 1., p. 217.

Their successors were free to make changes of any kind in their texts, to create variants, to omit various portions or replace them by others composed by themselves or by other folk-poets. Sometimes they even left their names in colophons, sometimes they did not. But nobody will ever be able to distinguish which part was composed by whom or decide what the 'original' ballad was like. Neither need these problems bother us. The Mymensingh ballads, as a whole, represent a part of Eastern Bengali folk-poetry and are creations of the village folk-genius, witnessing to the poetic abilities of the country people and not of exceptional individuals. And the countless folk-poets and singers who are indistinguishable from each other are but the voice of those dumb millions.

4. *Nature in the Mymensingh ballads and the Bāromāsī*

"When a Bengali poet, versed in Sanskrit lore. strives to excel in his description of Nature, we know too well from our Renaissance-literature what to expect from him; long and monotonous accounts of mornings and evenings, with a catalogue of flower-plants, not omitting the butterflies and the bees sucking honey from them—stereotyped and hackneyed figures of speech, copied from the earlier writers or what is worse, from Sanskrit classics—exhausting all resources of culture and obstructing the course of the narrative by wearisome diversions—these tax the patience of the readers to the utmost and create an apprehension at the outset, as if the description was never coming to an end. But when we come to these ballad-mongers, we are convinced that commonsense is by no means the monopoly of the learned; in fact we sometimes find the exact contrary to be the case. The rural bards do not sit down with the resolve to describe Nature and say something fine; they never write anything for the sake of display. In the course of a narrative of human action, Nature serves the purpose of a background, never made obtrusively prominent, but she often captures us being revealed by fine touches, all suddenly, as if by lightning flash,—presenting a gay panorama of landscape views taken at snapshot."[82]

I could not resist the temptation to quote this long portion from D. C. Sen's Introduction because, by confronting the descriptions of Nature in the Bengali classics and in the folk-ballads, he was able to point out two most essential characteristics of the latter—their conciseness and their artistic function. Regarding the length of the ballads, descriptions of Nature are rather few in number and seldom occupy more than a single verse or couplet, but they are usually very impressive. This is due to the fact that they are not used to give an objective picture, real objective descriptions of Nature being as rare as those of ships, houses, ceremonies, etc., but are cut-outs from natural scenery chosen from a special point of view and described with an emotional bias. It is because in most cases, the poets wish thereby to evoke a certain mood in the listeners or create a certain atmosphere. A few examples in illustration :

In *Mahuyā*, before going on to describe the despair of the heroine who has been commanded to kill her lover, the poet inserts a single verse : "Stars disappeared from the sky, the moon is not to be seen" (XV. 23). The sorrow of the mother whose son does not return home is introduced by a simple picture : "In Āśvin, clouds from the east float towards west" (*Maluyā*, III. 89). The first meeting of the lovers is preceded by the verse "On the banks of the Ganges, the air is full of the fragrance of keyā blossoms" (*Dewān Bhābnā*, IV. 11) and the final tragedy of the same ballad opens with the following verse: "The midnight was darkened by clouds, there was no star" (IX. 39). In almost every ballad, we could find verses of this kind, describing dark or bright nights, the beauty of the springtime, the turgid river in the rainy season, the oppressive heat of summer days, trees in blossom with singing birds—each according to the mood it is meant to conjure up.

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[82] *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (*Mymensingh Ballads*), I. 1., pp. lxxxvi-lxxxvii.

It would be wrong, however, to presume that these short descriptions have become stereotyped either in their wording or the mood which they are intended to create. Undoubtedly the folk-poets have a predilection for certain scenes, such as flooded rivers, singing birds on the branches of trees in blossom, or glittering stars in the sky, but they do not feel bound by any set phraseology to describe them, and in applying them to certain situations and moods, they evidently often rely on their own emotional experience. Otherwise we could hardly find the same verse "scraps of mad clouds float in the wind", introducing, in the two versions of the ballad *Maishāl bandhu*, quite different situations—in *version A* the mere statement that the girl went to bathe in the river (IV. 19-20), and in *version B* the seductive voice of the herdsman's flute (II. 13-14).

I think it is no coincidence that some of these descriptions of Nature start with ascertaining in which month of the year the respective situation takes place, for instance, "In Jyaishtha, the sun is ablaze and there is no wind" (*Maluyā*, I., 59), or "In Baiśākh, the heat is severe" (*Chandrāvatī*, XII. 13), or "The river of Āshāṛh is full from bank to bank" (*Dhopār pāṭ*, XIII.

14). Evidently there is a certain connection, in more than one respect, between these short descriptions of Nature and the well-known *Bāromāsī* songs to be found both in the classical and the folk-poetry of Bengal. The very principle is the same—to connect some natural phenomenon with either an element of action or, even more frequently, with a certain mood or emotional state. The majority of the Bengali folk-*Bāromāsīs* which I had an opportunity to analyze in another article mentioned above, describe the sorrows of a woman separated for a full year from her husband or her beloved and they usually devote the first part of each month's portion to a short description of a natural scene, characteristic of the month in question. Though different images are used for this purpose, these descriptions remind us very much of those to be found in the Mymensingh ballads. From a reading of both, we have not the slightest doubt that the *Bāromāsī* songs and the Mymensingh ballads are of the same origin and belong to the same cultural milieu, the former undoubtedly supplying the latter with the specific method of approach to Nature, described above.

There are, of course, proper *Bāromāsīs*, too, among the ballads from Mymensingh in D. C. Sen's edition. They are eight in number[83] and not all of them 'complete', that is covering a full year. In *Mahuyā*, the *Bāromāsī* counts only ten months (XIII. 28-43), and in *Kaṅka o Līlā* only six months (XVIII. 1-90)—though it is interesting to note that the latter ballad is called, in the introductory song, *Līlār bāromāsī*. But the number of months is not so important and we are never sure whether the ballad has been preserved complete.

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[83] Besides, only a few months are treated in some other ballads, like in *Dewānā Madinā* and *Āndhā-bandhu*. In these cases it is really difficult to decide whether they are parts of complete *Bāromāsīs*, with the main portions lost or just descriptions of certain months.

The *Bāromāsīs* in the ballads *Maluyā*, *Dewān Bhābnā*, *Kaṅka o Līlā* and *Malayār bāromāsī* are, according to my classification, made in the above-mentioned article, *Bāromāsīs* of separation, being lamentations of deserted women or descriptions of their sorrows. Those in *Mahuyā* and *Kamalā* are different, belonging to the epic type of *Bāromāsī*, the method of which is to relate a certain action which lasted for a year by the method of describing the months in turn. Especially *Kamalā* is interesting in this respect, as it is practically a repetition of contents already narrated, but in a changed form.

In *Bagulā*, the *Bāromāsī* forms the most essential part of the whole composition. This ballad is, in fact, an elaboration of a special type of *Bāromāsī*, in which the faithfulness of an abandoned wife is put to the test, for one full year, either by the husband himself or, as in this ballad, by a seducer. This theme is very popular throughout East Bengal and is to be found, with slight variations, in many songs.

If we are to sum up the folk-balladists' attitude to Nature, we may say that, in general, Nature does not attract them so much as to induce them to devote special descriptions to its charms and beauties [84]; it may be because, as we have stated already in another chapter, the folk-listeners prefer the extraordinary to the well-known, and for the village folk, Nature as such is a part of their every-day life. But this does not mean, on the other hand, that the poets are blind to its beauties; as we shall see in the analysis of the similes and metaphors used in the ballads, they often use various elements and phenomena of Nature to build up poetic images (face like a moon, eyes like stars, hair like a cloud, etc.). And this is, in another direction, basically the same approach which is to be seen both in the *Bāromāsīs* and in those short descriptions mentioned above.

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[84] The same is true of, for instance, Polish folk-poetry; *cf.* J. S. Bystron', *Artyzm piesn'i ludowej*, Poznan'-Warszawa, 1921, pp. 85-86.

5. *Reflections, maxims and colophons*

As we have shown already, when analyzing various ballads, the main thing is usually the story. This does not mean, however, that we do not come across any static elements in the Mymensingh ballads; the lyrical element, though never constituting the basic one and never prevailing over the epic, is represented here, too, in various forms. We have spoken of the short descriptions of Nature and their artistic function; besides, there are descriptions of other kinds, such as of beautiful houses, well-built ships, marriage ceremonies and, most frequently, of beautiful women and handsome men.

There remain, however, other non-epic portions to be described in more detail. They comprise various reflections, moral sentences, generalizations and maxims which, in many ballads, hold up the narrative. They do not form any obligatory component of the ballads, we do not find them in every composition, but the majority of our balladists do not hesitate to put them in when the opportunity offers. But these reflections and maxims are always well bound with the story itself, either supporting its development or being drawn from it as a kind of conclusion or moral instruction to be remembered.

We cannot help being reminded of another *genre* of Indian epic literature in which stories are similarly connected with moral sentences. I mean the famous prose tales of the type of *Panchatantra* or *Hitopadeśa*, which are always provided with maxims in verses, in the conclusion of each story. There is, however, a profound difference between the latter and the Mymensingh ballads which makes the resemblance merely superficial. The Sanskrit authors of narratives like *Panchatantra* had those maxims as their starting points when writing their tales, *i.e.*, they invented their stories or adapted them, from folk-literature and other sources, to illustrate the moral contained in the selected maxim. The folk-balladist's approach is reversed : he is not a moralist, but a narrator of an interesting story, which is his chief aim ; a reflection or maxim which he occasionally puts in being only a part of the folk-wisdom accumulated by previous generations and suiting the situation in question.

Indeed, it is folk-proverbs of which the reflections in the ballads remind us most ; we can find more than one parallel to the balladic maxims in the collections of Bengali provérbs. And just as it is not possible to construct any philosophical system on the basis of folk-proverbs, as they often contradict one another, being just sayings suiting different situations and generalizations of frequently controversial experience, it would be an achievement of doubtful value to try and build up the individual reflections contained in the ballads into a kind of folk-philosophy. They represent opinions about various aspects of life, shared by many, no doubt, but nothing more. And they vary exactly as opinions of different people may and do vary, wherever ideals and tastes, likes and dislikes are concerned.

Thus we need not be surprised to find, in different ballads, maxims and sayings contradicting one another. The folk-poet would use that one which suits his story and not any other. For instance, in *Mānjurmā*, canto II, we read : "If a man falls into distress, how many people will help him? The world is selfish and nobody cares for the sorrows of others." Similar is the statement, in *Kaṅka o Līlā* : "If a blossom falls to the earth, nobody will pick it up." But in *Māṇiktārā*, a more optimistic wisdom is coined : "If a man is without any help, he will get it from unexpected quarters."

Similarly, confusing is the confrontation of the individual reflections on love which is, as a matter of fact, the most frequent theme of maxims to be found in the Mymensingh ballads ; some of them have been mentioned already, in the first part of the present chapter. Reflections on love, nearly twenty in number, speak of different aspects, of the happiness as well as sorrows love brings to the lovers, of the value of love and the impossibility to resist its temptation, even of the immortality which love gives to the lovers. Here again, the folk-poet is guided only by the situation he has created and the general trend of his composition. Some of these reflections are really beautiful and deserve to be quoted here in full :

"If a magician touches poison, his strength turns it into nectar. The lover does not care whether he is high or low or whether he is good or bad. A precious jewel may be found in the dust, too, by the eyes of a lover. Death and age do not mean anything to a lover. Love cures the body cut by the enemy into pieces" (*Śyām Rāy*, VI. 14-20).

"The union of lime and betel is good, the meeting of eyes is better, but the best is the union of two hearts.

He who knows will say that love is the best thing in the world. Do not regret your life, if you die for love, because this is the best end you may achieve'' (*Āynā Bibi*, VII. 17-22).

''Love is better than gold and the world should not care for anything else. Love is the necklace on one's breast. Even death, if you die in love, is more than a dry life'' (*Mānjurmā*, V. 33-36).

''Sweet are sweets, sweeter is the water in the Ganges, sweeter is cold juice in summer, sweeter are nights of happiness after long days of sorrow, sweeter is the meeting of a mother with her child, sweeter is to find what one has lost, but sweetest of all is the re-union of lovers'' (*Maluyā*, XIV. 111-16).

''Sweet is the cold water of the river, sweeter is the blowing breeze, sweeter is green cocoanut, sweeter is the first love for a woman's heart, but sweetest of all is to get a husband according to the girl's heart'' (*Maishāl bandhu*, A, IV. 93-96 ; B, IV. 35-38).

''There is no cure for the illness of a person who is dying in sorrows. Debt, illness and poverty are bad, but worst of all is the pain of love in youth'' (*Āynā Bibi*, V. 14-16).

''The pain of separation is worse than a serpent's poison'' (*Kaṅka o Līlā*, XXII. 34).

There is no other subject which could compete with love, in the reflections of the balladists. Much less frequently, they reflect on the value and strength of youth, on the vanity of life (especially the Muslim poets have a predilection for this theme) and the inevitability of fate, on the mother's affection for her child, etc. Quite exceptionally we find a reflection of the burden of debt (*Maishāl bandhu*) and on the lack of any sense in the Hindu marriage ceremonies (*Māṇiktārā*).

Only in a few cases do the poets put their reflections into the mouth of one of the characters ; usually they simply interrupt their narrative to pronounce a maxim.

Sometimes, however, they introduce a reflection by putting their names before it. This practice of *colophons* is well known from classical Bengali poetry and there is no essential difference between the two branches of Bengali literature in this respect. In both of them, colophons usually mark the natural breaks between the individual parts of an epic composition and the ends of songs. They, of course, do not contain only reflections and maxims ; the major part of colophons to be found in the Mymensingh ballads are epic in character, either concluding a part of the narrative or summing up what has been said before, or commenting on the behaviour of the individual characters and the progress of the story. Yet the 'reflective' colophons, usually rather short (*e.g.*, "Who can avoid the fruits of karma?" asks Raghusūt, *Kaṅka o Līlā*, II. 10, or : "What kind of happiness is it", says Mansur Bayatī, "if it is not in your heart?" *Dewānā Madinā*, III. 107-08), seem to be most characteristic and they are one of the links connecting the Mymensingh ballads with the classical poetry of Bengal. And it should be noted that the folk-poets did not show, in colophons, any less poetic skill and ability for abstract thinking than their art colleagues.

6. *Verse and rhyme technique*

Let us conclude the present chapter with a short note on the verse and rhyme technique of the Mymensingh balladists.

As stated already, the prevailing metre is the *payār*, meant to be sung and therefore generally very regular. Only occasionally we find another metric scheme, most frequently the *tripadī*. The balladic *payār* does not differ in any respect from its classical counterpart and forms, in most cases, and independent structural unit containing either one single idea (one epic element) or two elements divided equally between the two verses of a couplet. Very seldom do we come across enjambment. In those ballads in which *tripadī* is used, besides *payār*, it is not associated with any special mood or contents; it seems to be employed merely to break the monotony of the *payār*.

In many ballads, there are refrains or verses sung by the chorus (*diśā*) but without the music, it is impossible to ascertain their metric structure.

Excepting the *tripadī* portions, with their well-known rhyme system (*a-a-b-c-c-b*), we do not find many deviations from the rhyme scheme *a-a-b-b-c-c*, etc. employed in the *payār* couplets. Besides full rhymes, either one- or two-syllabic—three-syllabic rhymes being very rare—we often find free assonances. As is common in folk-poetry, the same word is sometimes repeated, replacing the rhymed one, and the balladists do not avoid grammatical rhymes which come easily. Inner rhymes (*bhālo ghare bhālo bare kanyār hauk biyā*, Chandrāvatī IV. 22) are quite exceptional.

As for the verse and rhyme technique, the Mymensingh ballads do not differ in any respect from the Eastern Bengali folk-poetry still sung today.

IV. SIMILES AND METAPHORS

One of the characteristic features of the Mymensingh folk-ballads is a very frequent use of similes and metaphors. As, to my knowledge, no analysis of this kind has so far been made in the folk-epics of any other nation, we are obliged to rely on our impression, which is that the frequency of similes and metaphors is much larger in the Mymensingh ballads than in the folk-epics of other nations. This impression I gained after reading Scottish and German ballads, Slovak epic robber-songs or Russian byliny. The total number of similes and metaphors found in the Mymensingh ballads is close on 2,500, which, considering the epic character of these songs, is really a quite formidable number.

Before we proceed to analyze these figures of speech from various points of view, it is necessary to remind the reader of the fact well known to every folklorist—that the folk-poetry of each nation has a certain stock of poetic images which appear again and again, both in the same wording and in variants, constituting a kind of common fund of poetic expressions. The Czech folklorist B. Václavek speaks of "a stock of typical idioms, images and phrases used by each individual belonging to the people".[85] Though this thesis is evidently correct and has been known for a considerable time already, for instance to German folklorists, it is rather surprising to see that nobody has so far based a thorough study of a certain nation's folk-poetry on it.

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[85] P. Václavek, *Pisemnictvi a lidová tradice* (Literature and the Folk-Tradition), Praha (2nd Ed.), 1947, p. 39. *Cf.* also M. Jousse, *E'tudes de psychologie linguistique* (Studies on Linguistic Psychology), Paris, 1925, p. 113.

And yet it is obvious that such a detailed analysis of the similes and metaphors of a nation's folk-poetry could produce highly interesting results. The folk-poetry can tell us a great deal about a nation's folk-psychology, about the tastes and likings shared by the people, about the ways their folk-poets react to reality and express more than merely their individual, subjective feelings. And it must be admitted that the common psychology, which underlies characteristic features distinguishing one nation from the other, has not yet been studied as it should be.

Besides, a thorough analysis of the stock of common similes and metaphors can open broad vistas to a historian of literature and aesthetics, too. Folk-poetry, which may be supposed to represent a more 'primitive' (in the evolutional sense of the word) stage in the development of poetry, may help us to solve the very interesting and intricate problem of how the poetic image originated and in what way it developed, from its most simple basis to its fully expanded forms.

Finally, such a study is of special importance in cases of literatures like the Bengali, in which there was no deep gulf in the classical period, between folk- and art-literature. It was D. C. Sen who noted very similar and sometimes almost identical idioms and metaphors in both the Vishnuist poetry of mediaeval Bengal and the folk-ballads, and drew, in my opinion, a very proper conclusion from this observation: "We believe that the ballad-poetry did not supply the Vaishnava poets with these fine ideas. Nor did the ballad-makers copy from Vaishnava poetry. Both got the ideas and the beautiful language in which we find them couched, from the rich phraseology of emotional poetry with which Bengal in those days abounded. . . . The ballad-makers and the Vaishnava poets attacked a common source, the rural poetic phraseology current in the air of Bengal ; so that every poet who studied life, and not the Sanskrit classics alone, got the vivid images and this finished poetical language first-hand from his own hearth and home. The material was before the poets, if they only cared to utilize and not contemptuously reject it as a rustic thing beneath notice." [86] And again : "The ballad-makers, it is obvious, did not owe anything to the Vaishnava poets and we beg to repeat that the whole atmosphere of Bengal being charged with gay notes of love, a phraseology rich in the expressions of sexual romance was already formed in the countryside. The Vaishnava poets and the ballad-makers both drew from the treasure-house of this phraseology." [87]

These statements might be misleading, however, in one respect—if they should give the reader the impression that the use of common similes and metaphors means mechanical repetition of ready-made phrases and poetic images. The analysis will show us that the individual similes and metaphors are rarely taken over in a literal wording, but more often changed and adapted both to various situations and to the artistic aims followed by the folk-poet. Besides, the common stock of similes and metaphors does not cover the whole body of poetic images found in the Mymensingh ballads ; there are many which occur once only, in a certain ballad, and thus cannot be considered a part of the common poetic fund. This fact shows that the common similes and metaphors do not represent any hindrance to the folk-poet's imagination and poetic abilities; that they are, in a sense, only a potential, and not an obligatory reservoir of poetic images.

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[86] *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, II. 1., pp. xxi-xxii.

[87] *Ibid.*, III. 1., pp. 201-02.

Finally, we shall have to pay special attention to those ballads which were not collected by Chandrakumar De, in order to show that there is no difference between the similes and metaphors found in his ballads and those collected by other collectors. This is what may be considered internal evidence of the genuineness of the Mymensingh ballads and another proof of the fact that they are real folk-creations.

The common fund of poetic images, obtained from the Mymensingh ballads, represents nearly two thousand (close on 80%) similes and metaphors found in these songs. Among them, however, there are many so stereotype that it is possible that they are no longer felt as 'poetic' images at all, by either the folk-poets or their audience. On the other hand, we had to exclude many charming and poetic images, for the simple reason that they do not occur more than once in our ballads, even though in their character and structure, they are strongly reminiscent of folk-images, having many a parallel among the common similes. They will be treated separately.

Not differentiating for the moment between similes and metaphors, we shall start our analysis by concentrating on the first member of the Bengali simile—the *comparatum;* by doing so, we shall be able to discover where the folk-poets find materials for their poetic images. The result is not very surprising—it shows that most materials are at hand in the natural surroundings of our balladists. Most frequently represented are the elements, the celestial bodies and natural phenomena (fire, moon, stars, thunder, clouds, darkness and such like—about 500), followed by animals (birds, bee, snake, etc.—more than 150) and by botanical terms (flower, tree, thorn, etc.—less than 150). Even if we were to exclude the metaphoric, but stereotype use of the verb *jvalā* (to burn, to be ablaze), often expressing an intense emotion (love, hatred, pain, anger), the preponderance of this category would still remain.

Another group is formed by the images the comparatum of which is a part of the human body ; we have found about 300 instances, but we should perhaps exclude nearly a hundred of them in which the genitive ***prāṇer*** (of the soul, of the heart) is used, meaning 'dear'. Similarly, if we exclude the metaphoric genitive *sonār* (golden), used in the same sense, or instead of 'beautiful', but in no less stereotype connections, there remains a large group of about 150 similes and metaphors based on precious metals and jewels. The fourth group is centred around religious and mythological figures and terms (individual gods, fate, fairies, etc.) which are to be found in about 120 instances.

As for the remaining cases, it is difficult to form more compact groups out of them ; there occur various objects (stone, lamp, poison, arrow, river, etc.), states and actions (play, dream, fever, etc.) and denominations (madman, enemy, witness, etc.) which resist grouping together in a more natural way.

The first conclusions we may draw from these numbers are as follows :

1. concrete notions greatly exceed abstracts ;
2. in creating a simile or a metaphor, the folk-poet turns most frequently to Nature, which perfectly suits the rural character of the Mymensingh ballads ;

3. the folk-poet prefers phenomena more rare, distant and 'mysterious' (celestial bodies, elements) to the better-known ones (animals, plants);
4. compared with classical Bengali poetry, the folk-ballads have a much smaller number of similes and metaphors based on religion and mythology.

But let us turn our attention, now, to the second part of the simile, to the *comparandum*, in order to find out what it is what the folk-poets want to 'describe', to make apparent and to stress by a poetic image. The answer is simple and unambiguous: More than 90% of all similes and metaphors serve to describe ***human beings*** (more often women than men, in keeping with the character and contents of the Mymensingh ballads), *viz.*, their physical appearance (most frequently beauty), moral qualities and states of mind (goodness, wickedness, happiness, sorrow, pain, etc.) and their relations to other people (love, hatred, etc.). Not more than 60 images are linked with other objects and natural phenomena (ship, bird, clouds, rain, etc.). This difference in frequency is striking, indeed, and enables us to answer unambiguously the first question: What is it that urges the folk-poet to use a poetic image? It is the human being, either as object or as subject.

The second question which must inevitably be put, is more difficult to answer: What is the peculiar function of these poetic images? Are they perhaps meant to stimulate the listener's imagination, to help him imagine the object of the poetic 'description' in a more precise way, so that his idea may correspond to the poet's idea as much as possible? Certainly not. Descriptions of feminine beauty, in the ballads, prove it convincingly. Similes and metaphors used in these descriptions are repeated so often that the heroines thus described are completely void of any individuality and it would be practically impossible to distinguish one woman from another, with nothing more to go on than their physical appearance as described by the folk-balladists. All of them have, for instance, faces like the moon, eyes like stars, hair like a cloud, etc. The result is not an individual beautiful woman (or man), but a *type* of feminine (or masculine) beauty.

Is, then, the function of similes and metaphors purely aesthetic? Undoubtedly the aesthetic element is present here, but in a somewhat different sense than in art-poetry, in which the aesthetic element appears as a deviation from the neutral language and affects us because of its originality and unhackneyed combination of words. In folk-poetry, however, originality does not play any important role and, through constant repetition, the poetic images lose to a great extent their aesthetic function.

Thus the most feasible explanation seems to be that the main aim of the similes and metaphors, in our ballads, is to intensify the effect of the narrative or its relative portion. This *emotional intensification* would explain also why so many similes and metaphors are devoted to the description of psychological phenomena, such as various states of mind, feelings, mental qualities, etc. For a simple man, unused to psychological introspection, it is rather difficult to express and describe emotions and mental states; generations of folk-poets have found a whole series of such expressions, acceptable to the village folk, both in their content and formulation. And these expressions, most frequently similes and metaphors, are used repeatedly to make the narrative (or the lyrical songs, as well) more effective and impressive.

We may, perhaps, go even farther and assume that the original impulse for creating a simile or a metaphor was given by the intention to *concretize an abstract idea.* In the folk-poetry of every nation, we find certain abstract terms compared to certain concrete things, in countless stereotype associations; from the Mymensingh ballads, the following examples may be quoted: cruelty—stone, pain—poison or fire, youth—storm, surprise—thunder, loneliness—*śeolá* (watermoss), etc. These words have a tendency to become symbols, which enables metaphors of the type *pāshāṇer bāp* (literally: stony father, *i.e.*, father hard or cruel as a stone); these metaphoric associations are sometimes even used as idioms and are not limited exclusively to the poetic language.

It is necessary to note, once more, that the stereotype similes do not cover the whole of those found in the Mymensingh ballads. The folk-balladists often try to enrich the common fund by new creations of their own. These new poetic images, then, either die with their author, or are accepted by other poets, taken over and imitated so that they also become part of the common fund.

Let us now give a complete list of all similes and metaphors found in the Mymensingh ballads more than once, with their respective frequency in brackets. They are arranged according to their comparanda, to enable the reader to make a check on what has been said above, regardless of the stylistic variations and deviations in which the individual images appear. As a whole, they represent the complete fund of common similes and metaphors, as represented in the ballads.

I. Physical qualities of human beings:

(a) A man or woman beautiful as:

1. a god (unnamed): *ek ek putra yeman tār deb abatār* ("each of his sons like an incarnation of a god"), *Kamalā*, XII. 4. (3x)
2. the god Indra: *tabeta haiba chhāoyālgo Indrer samān* ("the boy will be like Indra"), *Kamalā-rāṇī*, VII. 28. (2x)
3. the god Kārtik: *dekhite sundar putra Kārtik kumār* (" the handsome son looks like the young Kārtik "), *Maluyā*, VIII. 36. (8x)
4. the goddess Lakshmī: *Lakṣhmīr samān rūp* ("beautiful as Lakshmī"), *Rūpavatī*, V. 13. (12x)
5. the god Madan: *rūpete jiniyā yena Ratir Madan* (" as if surpassing Rati's Madan in beauty "), *Kamalā*, I. 26. (3x)
6. antelope: *dekhite sundar kanyā baner hariṇī* (" the lovely girl looks like a wild antelope "), *Pīr*, III. 17. (7x)
7. bird: *dekhite sundar rūpre śyām śukapākhī* (" her beauty is like a dark parrot "), *Āndhā bandhu*, I. 23. (3x)
8. doll: *kanyā sonār putulā* ["a girl (like) a golden doll"], *Jīrālanī*, X. 25. (2x)
9. fairy: *parīr mata nārī* ("a woman like a fairy "), *Maluyā*, XV. 4. (21x)
10. fire: *kanyā agnir samān* (" girl like flame "), *Bheluyā*, XX. 4. (7x)
11. flower: *phuler kumārī* (" girl like a flower "), *Ratan*, II. 15. (35x)

12. garland : *tumi galār mālā* ("you are a garland round the neck"), *Mahuyā*, VIII. 18. (5x)
13. gold : *sonār tanu* ("the golden body"), *Kaṅka*, V. 74. (40x)
14. image : *kanyā subarṇa pratimā* ("the girl, a beautiful image"), *Kāñchan*, XX. 17. (2x)
15. jewel : *dekhe ekṭi māṇik* ["he sees a jewel (a girl)"], *Maluyā*, III. 15. (8x)
16. light : *rūpete ujālā kanyār kānchan nagarī* ("the golden city is illuminated by the girl's beauty"), *Bheluyā*, II. 31. (17x)
17. moon : *chānd hena kanyā* ("girl like the moon"), *Kamalā*, XII. 22. (80x)
18. snake's jewel : *sāper māthāy yeman thāikyā jvale maṇi* ("like the jewel shining on the snake's head"), *Mahuyā*, I. 26. (2x)
19. star : *dekhite śunite kanyā āsmāner tārā* ("the girl looks like a star in the sky"), *Maishāl*, A, IV. 5. (7x)
20. sun : *sūryer samān rūp* ("beauty like the sun"), *Chandrāvatī*, VII. 15. (17x)

Note. In some cases, as in 12 and 13, it is difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of the simile or metaphor ; besides 'beautiful', it may be interpreted as 'dear', at least in some instances.

(b) Parts of the human body, beautiful as :

21. a rainbow (eyebrow) : *dekhite Rāmer dhanu kanyār yugma bhuru* ("the girl's eyebrow looks like rainbow"), *Kamalā*, III. 7. (2x)

22. bird (voice): *kaṇṭhete lukāiyā tār kokile kay kathā* ("the cuckooes hidden in her throat speak"), *Kamalā*, III. 14. (2x)

    bird (eyes): *ākhir phānkete tār nāchāy khanjanā* ("in the sockets of her eyes birds dance"), *Maluyā*, XII. 13. (2x)

23. burden (hair): *keśer bhārete kanyā hāṭite nā pāre* ("the girl cannot walk because of the burden of her hair"), *Kāñchan*, IV. 4. (2x)
24. cloud (hair): *megher samān keś* ("hair like a cloud"), *Mahuyā*, XIII. 11. (18x)
25. gold (face): *sonār mukh* ("golden face"), *Māṇiktārā*, II. 45. (2x)
26. flower (face): *mukhete phuṭṭyā uṭhe kanak champār phul* ("on her face champa-flowers blossom"), *Mahuyā*, I. 31. (20x)

    flower (eyes): *dui ākhi aparājitā* ("two eyes like aparājitā-flowers"), *Ratan*, IV. 8. (3x)

27. jewel (smile): *hīrā-mati jvale kanyā yakhan nākī hāse* ("jewels and pearls shine when the girl smiles"), *Kājalrekhā*, I. 7. (5x)
28. moon (face): *mukhkhāni dekhe kainyār chandrer matan* ("the girl's face looks like the moon"), *Maishāl*, A, IX. 20. (45x)
29. star (eyes): *tārār sama ānkhi* ("eyes like stars"), *Mahuyā*, XIII. 11. (21x)
30. vermilion (face): *gaṇḍete sindūrer jhālā* ("lustre of vermilion on her cheeks"), *Rūpavatī*, II. 51. (3x)
31. wave (hair): *Gaṅgār taraṅga Līlār dīghal keśpaś* ("Lila's long hair is like the waves of the Ganges"), *Kaṅka*, XXII. 39. (2x)

II. Mental qualities of a man

(c) A man wicked, mean, cruel, terrible as :

32. a demon : *bimātā Rākshasī* ("stepmother, a demon"), *Jīrālanī*, V. 21. (11x)
33. a dog : *dushmaṇ kukur kājī* ("Kazi, the wicked dog"), *Maluyā*, XII. 107. (3x)
34. an enemy : *bāp bādī haila* ("the father has become an enemy"), *Ratan*, VI. 11. (4x)
35. a snake : *panthe kāla sāp* ("the black snake on the road"), *Kamalā*, XV. 71. (6x)
36. a stone : *pāshāṇ māo bāp* ("parents like stone"), *Mahuyā*, XVI. 11. (13x)
37. thunder : *rāo karile Miyā deoyāy yemun ḍāke* ("when Miya cried, it was like thunder"), *Raghu*, IV. 19. (2x)
38. a tiger : *baner bāghe khāichhe mor sarbāṅga śarīr* ("wild tigers devour my body"), *Rūpavatī*, III. 19. (9x)
39. a worm : *pūjār phule kīṭ dila hānā* ("the worm ate into the sacrificial flower"), *Kaṅka*, XIII. 6. (4x)
40. Yama (the god of death) : *sāmnete Humrā bāidyā Yam yena khārā* ("Humra the Gypsy stands in front of them like Yama"), *Mahuyā*, XXIII. 3. (6x)

III. Other qualities of a man

(d) A man unstable as :

41. a bee : *phuler sahita dekha bhramar pirit kare* ("the bee dallies with a flower"), *Āndhā*, IV. 118. (6x)

(*e*) *A man greedy as :*

42. hunger : *khidhā lāgle taptā bhāt jurāiyā khāy* ("a hungry man eats hot rice"), *Maluyā*, X. 65. (2x)

(*f*) *A man quick as :*

43. the wind : *chhuṭibár kāle yemun kāl baiśākher bāo* ("she runs like the wind of a Baiśákh storm"), *Tilak*, XI. 42. (2x)

IV. Man in relation to others

(*g*) *A man dear to somebody as :*

44. a bee : *bhramar hailām āmi tumi baner phul* ("I am a bee and you are a wild flower"), *Mahuyā*, XVI. 36. (20x)
45. a bird : *tumi kār pinjarār pākhi* ("the bird in whose cage are you?"), *Malayā*, VII. 6. (40x)
46. a blind man's eye : *nārīr kāchhe pati yemun andaler nayan* ("the husband is for the wife as is an eye for a blind man"), *Māṇiktārā*, VII. 129. (2x)
47. a blind man's stick : *tumi andher ye laṛī* ("you are a blind man's stick"), *Firoz*, VIII. 123. (6x)
48. blood : *māyer buker lau putra ār jhī* ("the son and the daughter are the blood of the mother's heart"), *Madinā*, II. 6. (9x)
49. the Ganges : *tumi Gaṅgār pāni* ("you are the water of the Ganges") *Chandrāvatī*, XII. 95. (3x)

50. a garland : *tumi galār mālā* ("you are the garland round the neck"), *Mahuyā*, VIII. 18. (7x) (*cf.* the note above)
51. gold : *āmār svāmī kānchā sonā* ("my husband is pure gold"), *Maluyā*, XII. 111. (7x) (*cf.* the note above)
52. head : *debatā hena tomāy rākhibām māthāte* ("I shall carry you on my head like a god"), *Bīrnārāyaṇ*, III. 22. (3x)
53. heart : *āmār Mānjurmā buker kalijā* ("my M. is the heart in my breast") *Mānjurmā*, VI. 65. (76x)
54. honey : *tumi āmār mukher madhu* ("you are the honey of my mouth"), *Bhābnā*, IV. 44. (2x)
55. a jewel : *tumi āmār maṇimuktā* ("you are my jewel"), *Kamalā*, XIII. 20. (17x)
56. a collyrium : *āmār nā Mānjurmā nayaner kājal* ("my M. is the collyrium of the eyes"), *Mānjurmā*, VI. 61-2. (9x)
57. a lamp : *kanyā kuler pardīm* ("the daughter is the lamp of the family"), *Malayā*, II. 11. (16x)
58. the apple of the eye : *tumi āmār ākhir tārā* ("you are the apple of my eye"), *Mahuyā*, XI. 14. (22x)
59. religion : *tumi āmār dharam karam* ("you are my religion"), *Kamalā*, V. 11. (3x)
60. a snake's jewel[44] : *satīr nā pati yeman sāper māthār maṇi* ("the husband is for a wife like the jewel on the head of a snake"), *Kāñchan*, X. 31. (2x)
61. a treasure : *māyer dhan* ("mother's treasure"), *Mahuyā*, XVI. 29. (40x)

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[44] According to a popular belief, the snake has a jewel on his head; if it gets lost, the snake is angry and dangerous. This jewel is said to shine in the night and attract fireflies, which the snake eats.

62. the tulsi-plant : *āmār nā Mānjurmā deber tulsī* ("my M. is god's tulsi"), *Mānjurmā*, VI. 71. (2x)
63. a tree and creeper : *tumi hao tarure bandhu āmi hai latā* ("you are a tree, my friend, I am a creeper"), *Kaṅka*, V. 59. (4x)

(*h*) *Inequality between people :*

64. flower and thorn : *tumi ta bāger pushpa āmi hailām kāṭā* ("you are a flower in the garden, I am a thorn"), *Śyām*, III. 3. (2x)
65. flower and cow-dung : *gobare phuṭila padmaphul* ("the lotus has grown in cow-dung") *Kaṅka*. VII. 38. (2x)
66. dust : *tomār charaṇāy parbhu āmi panther dhūlā* ("I am dust under your feet"), *Tilak*, II. 57. (2x)
67. dwarf : *bāun haiyā kena chānde bāṛāi hāt* ("why do I, a dwarf, stretch out my hand towards the moon?"), *Dhopār pāṭ*, III. 17. (2x)
68. moon and earth : *chānd haiyā kena jamine bāṛāo hāt* ("why do you, a moon, stretch out your hand towards the earth?"), *Dhopār pāṭ*, I. 28. (3x)
69. nectar and poison : *amita chhāṛiyā kena bish haila bhālā* ("why do you relish poison, leaving nectar aside?"), *Āndhā*, IV. 63. (3x)

V. Mental states and emotions

(i) *Love :*

70. bee : *tomār lāigyā kata bhramar pāgal haiyā phire* ("how many bees have become crazy because of you"), *Kamalā*, V. 87. (10x)

71. begging : *tomār yaiban bhikshā kari* ("I beg for your youth") *Āynā*, VII. 12. (4x)
72. burden : *yauban haila bhāri* ("her youth became heavy"), *Maluyā*, X. 37. (7x)
73. fire : *ghasir āgune tārā dahiyā marila* ("they were burned in the heat of fire"), *Āndhā*, IV. 115. (62x)
74. fruit : *pirit gāchher phal* ("the fruit of the tree of love"), *Śyām*, V. 48. (3x)
75. gift : *yauban dān karo more* ("give me your youth"), *Bīrnārāyaṇ*, III. 12. (5x)
76. honey : *bilāo phuler madhu* ("pour out the flower's honey"), *Kamalā*, V. 75. (6x)
77. jewel : *pīrit ratan* ("love is a jewel"), *Mānjurmā*, V. 69. (2x)
78. drunkenness : *hiyā āmār haila unmādinī* ("my heart was intoxicated"), *Śīlā*, V. 42. (4x)
79. madman : *tomār lāigyā kanyā hailām ye pāglā* ("for you, girl, I lost my reason"), *Bhābnā*, IV. 43. (50x)
80. storm : *āshāiṛhā joyārer jal yauban* ("youth is the water of a storm in Āshāṛh"), *Kamalā*, III. 21. (10x)
81. theft : *āmār manachor* ("the thief of my heart"), *Dhopār pāṭ*, III. 12. (10x)
82. union : *dui jane mane prāṇe ek haye gela* ("the two became one in heart and soul"), *Bheluyā*, IX. 44. (10x)
83. wandering : *more karle hār-diś* ("you made me lose my way"), *Bheluyā*, IV. 12. (2x)

(j) *Happiness :*

84. bird : *kaitarā kaitarī yeman khopāte basiyā bās kare mukhe mukh milāiyā* ("like a couple of

doves sitting in the dove-cote and putting cheek to cheek''), *Kāñchan*, XIII. 12-13. (7x)

85. blind man : *andha phiriyā pāy dunayan* (''the blind man getting his two eyes back''), *Soṇārāy*, VIII. 19. (5x)
86. heaven : *āsmān tale lāmyā sarag bhūmete āsila* (''heaven has descended to earth''), *Bīrnārāyaṇ*, V. 65. (2x)
87. revival : *marā yena bāchyā uṭhla* (''as if a dead man was revived''), *Kāñchan*, IX. 2. (6x)
88. snake's jewel : *sāpe yeman pāila maṇi* (''as if a snake had found its jewel''), *Mahuyā*, XIII. 44. (3x)
89. thirst : *piyāsī pāila jal* (''the thirsty man found water''), *Mahuyā*, XIII. 44. (2x)
90. treasure : *hārānidhi pāiyāchhi* (''I found the lost treasure''), *Bheluyā*, XIII. 35. (3x)

(*k*) *Anger :*

91. blackness : *munir mukh haila kālī* (''the saint's face turned black''), *Mahuyā*, XX. 75. (3x)
92. fire : *krodhete jvalila* (''he was consumed with anger''), *Kamalā*, V. 146. (many times)

(*l*) *Fear :*

93. heart : *kāpe hiyā* (''his heart trembles''), *Kamalā*, XV. 47. (15x)

(*m*) *Surprise :*

94. sky : *āsmān bhāṅgiyā paṛe māthār upare* (''the sky falls down on his head''), *Maluyā*, XII. 140 (5x)

95. thunder: *mastake haila yena bajrer patan* ("as if thunder had struck his head"), *Kaṅka,* XV. 108. (13x)

(n) Loneliness:

96. śeolā (water-moss): *suter heolā aiyā bhāsiyā beṛāi* ("becoming a śeolā in the stream I am floating"), *Mahuyā,* V. 26. (9x)

(o) Pain, sorrow, trouble, disappointment:

97. abode: *kon bidhi bhāṅgila tor eman sukher bāsā* ("what fate has broken such a happy abode as yours?"), *Sannamālā,* II. 36. (6x)

98. animals and birds: *Kamalār kāndane kānde paśupākhī* ("animals and birds weep and join in Kamalā's lamentation"), *Kamalā,* XIV. 6. (14x)

99. ashes: *mukhe paṛla chhāi* ("ashes fell into his mouth"), *Māṇiktārā,* V. 88. (10x)

100. basket: *āpani māthāy lailām duḥkher pasarā* ("I took the basket of sorrow on my head"), *Chandrāvatī,* XII. 28. (2x)

101. bee: *baisyā kānde phuler bhramar* ("the bee sits and weeps"), *Maishāl,* B, IV. 11. (2x)

102. bird: *pinjirā kairā khāli uiṛāchhe paṅkhinī* ("the bird flew away leaving the cage empty"), *Mahuyā,* XI. 2. (25x)

103. blackness: *kanyer yauban haila kālī* ("the girl's youth turned black"), *Mahuyā,* XIV. 3. (9x)

104. blindness: *kāndiyā kanyer māye andha karchhe ākhi* ("the girl's mother was blind with weeping"), *Maishāl,* A, VIII. 15. (4x)

105. clay: *bhābiyā sonār aṅga haichhere māṭī* ("troubles turned her golden body to clay"), *Tilak*, III. 74. (3x)

106. cobweb: *kāndite kāndite chakshe mākaṛasā jhure* ("when weeping her eyes are covered with a cobweb"), *Bheluyā*, XIII. 96. (2x)

107. creeper: *birakka chhāṛā kāulīr latā bichhāiyā paṛila* ("she fell down like a creeper without a tree"), *Bhārai*, 261. (2x)

108. darkness: *bāp bideśe gela purī andhakār* ("the father went abroad, the town is dark"), *Kamalā*, XV. 105. (29x)

109. fate: *āmāder kapāl bhāṅgila* ("our fate is broken"), *Kaṅka*, XIII. 30. (30x)

110. fever: *chintājvare guṇarāj maila* ("the physician was dying in the fever of troubles"), *Kaṅka*, I. 19. (4x)

111. fire: *duḥkher jvālā* ("the flame of sorrow"), *Bhābnā*, IV. 76. (many times)

112. flower: *phul haila bāsī* ("the flower withered"), *Kaṅka*, XVI. 9. (16x)

113. heart: *āmār phāṭāy buk* ("my heart breaks") *Madinā*, II. 54. (9x)

114. jewel: *hārāilām ratna āmi abhāginī* ("I, unfortunate one, lost the jewel"), *Śyām*, X. 43. (8x)

115. lamp: *nibyāchhe niśār dīp kairā āndhāiratā* ("the night lamp went out, it was dark"), *Maluyā*, XV. 60. (6x)

116. madman: *pāgal haila, bāurā haila, dāonā haila* ("he turned mad"). (many times)

117. moon and stars: *ākāśete chandra kānde tārā kānde raiyā* ("the moon and the stars weep in the sky") *Kaṅka*, XIII. 57. (13x)

118. poison : *māthāy dāruṇ bish* ("the cruel poison of the head"), *Mukuṭ*, II. 125. (16x)

119. rain : *dui ākhi jhare kanyār śāoner dhārā* ("from the girl's eyes the rain of Śrābaṇ flows"), *Bagulā*, II. 19. (4x)

120. river : *dariyā śukāiyā yāy* ("the river dries up"), *Madinā*, VII. 99. (14x)

121. ocean : *ḍubāiyonā sonār saṃsār akul sāyare* ("do not drown the golden world in the bottomless ocean"), *Firoz*, V. 8. (7x)

122. shadow : *yei re birakker tale yāi āre chhāyā pāoner āśe/ patra chhedyā raudra lāge dekha kapāler doshe* ("whenever I come under a tree hoping for its shadow, behold, it sheds its leaves and the sun burns because of my bad luck"), *Āynā*, X. 19-20. (4x)

123. ship : *bharāḍubi hailām āmi madhya dariyāy* ("I got drowned in the middle of the river"), *Mānjurmā*, III. 67-68. (3x)

124. shock : *tomār bāṃśī dila buke baṛa dāgā* ("your flute gave my heart a shock"), *Āndhā*, VI. 39. (6x)

125. spear : *buke raila śel* ("the heart was struck by a spear"), *Kamalā*, V. 14. (9x)

126. stone : *Garger kāndane dekha pāthar hay jal* ("look, even a stone melts when Garga weeps"), *Kaṅka*, XXIII. 59. (16x)

127. tear : *chaksher jalete bhijāy basumātā* ("the earth is flooded with his tears") *Mahuyā*, XXIV. 30. (19x)

128. thorn : *mane bindhāy kāmṭā* ("a thorn pricks my heart"), *Chandrāvatī*, IX. 30. (9x)

129. treasure : *māyer buker dhan chure laiyā yāy* ("thieves are stealing the treasure of her mother's heart"), *Malayā*, XIII. 22. (2x)

130. tree : *āmār duḥkhete dekha jhare briksher pātā* ("look, over my sorrow the tree sheds its leaves"), *Kamalā*, V. 14. (9x)

131. wandering : *mā jhi duijan āchhi hārā diś* ("both of us, mother and daughter, have lost our way"), *Maishāl*, A, VIII. 51. (5x)

132. canker : *bisham chintār kīṭ paśila antare* ("the poisonous canker of sorrow entered the heart"), *Kaṅka*, XIII. 54. (3x)

(*p*) *Youth* :

133. burden : *yaubaner bhāre kanyā sāmne paṛe elī* ("the girl is bent beneath the burden of youth"), *Kamalā*, IV. 3. (6x)

134. ebb : *yaibanbhāti pāile ār nā phiirā āse* ("when the ebb of youth recedes, it never comes back"), *Pīr*, XI. 17. (3x)

135. flower : *tor yaiban pushpa tulyā lo kanyā mālā se gāṃthima* ("taking the flower of your youth, girl, I shall make a garland), *Ratan*, IV. 7. (5x)

136. river : *ekhane yaiban nadī bahila ujānā* ("the river of youth went upstream now"), *Bheluyā*, IV. 14. (3x)

137. ship : *āshāṛhmāse dighalā pānsīre nayā jale bhāse/ sehi mata Sonāir yaiban khelāy bātāse* ("like a long boat floating on the waters, in the month of Āshāṛh, Sonāi's youth plays in the wind"), *Bhābnā*, II. 25-26. (3x)

VI. Other descriptions of a man

138. ant : *sadāgarer bāṛī yeman pipṛāy ghire* ("as if ants surrounded the merchant's house"), *Bheluyā*, VIII. 46. (2x)

139. banana-tree : *kātyālīr kalāgāchh yeman upṛāiyā paṛe* ("he fell like an axed banana-tree"), *Śīlā*, X. 30. (4x)

140. beauty : *aṅger lābaṇi Sunāirge bāiyā pare bhūme* ("the beauty of Sunāi's limbs flows down to the earth"), *Bhābnā*, II. 23. (5x)

141. blot : *kuputra kuler kāli* ("a bad son is a blot on the family"), *Bīrnārāyaṇ*, VI. 54. (6x)

142. collyrium : *kalaṅka kājal haila* ("shame was turned into collyrium"), *Pīr*, XIII. 31. (2x)

143. dream : *svapner hāsi svapner kāndan* ("a dreamy smile and dreamy crying"), *Chandrāvatī*, XII. 124. (8x)

144. fate : *ki jāni lekhyāchhe bidhi kapāle āmār* ("I do not know what fate has inscribed on my forehead"). (many times)

145. flower : *nā phuṭite biyār phul karila mukh bāsi* ("before opening, the flower of marriage had withered"), *Śīlā*, XI. 6. (2x)

146. helmsman : *kāṇḍārī nā thākle yeman nāo pāke paṛe* ("like a ship without a helmsman sucked into a whirlpool"), *Kāñchan*, X. 33. (2x)

147. meat : *hiyār māṃsa kāṭyā dile āpan nā hay par* ("even if you cut the meat of your heart, your own does not become foreign"), *Dhopār pāṭ*, XII. 24. (2x)

148. sea : *dayār sāgar* ("the sea of compassion"). (many times)

149. shackle : *kāṭi saṃsārer ḍor* ("I cut the bonds of the world"), *Kāñchan*, V. 16. (2x)

150. waist : *chalte māijā bhāṅgyā pare* ("when walking, her waist breaks"), *Firoz*, IV. 10. (2x)

151. way : *svāmī ye striloker gati* ("the husband is the way of his wife"), *Kāñchan*, XXIII. (2x)

VII. The remaining metaphors and similes

152. Shiva's hairknot (clouds) : *śiber jatā piṅgal megh* (clouds dark as Śiva's hairknot"), *Maishāl*, B, VI. 35. (2x)

153. vermilion (clouds) : *sindūr yeman āsmāner gāy* ("like vermilion on the body of the sky"), *Kāñchan*, VIII. 27. (4x)

154. garment (clouds) : *kālāmeghe kare sāj āsmāner gāy* ("the black clouds are the garment of the sky"), *Kamalā*, XV. 28. (3x)

155. star (ship) : *naukā chhuṭe yena tārā* ("the ship runs like a star"), *Bheluyā*, VIII. 102. (3x)

156. bird (ship) : *paṅkhī uṛā kare pānsī* ("the ship flies like a bird"), *Maluyā*, XVI. 76. (4x)

157. wind (ship) : *diṅgā pabaner āge yāy* ("the boat runs before the wind"), *Bīrnārāyaṇ*, I. 20. (2x)

158. breast (surface) : *dūr Gāṅger buke* ("on the breast of the distant Ganges), *Bagulā*, XV. 5. (2x)

159. crystal (water) : *phaṭiker mata jal* ("water like crystal"), *Māṇiktārā*, VIII. 7. (2x)

160. coal (horse's tongue) : *jibbā gotā dekhi ghoṛār jvalanta āngerā* ("the tongue of the horse is like a glowing cinder"), *Bhārai*, 203 and, literally, *Mukuṭ*, II. 27.

161. wind (horse): *paban bāhane chhuṭe ghorā* ("the horse runs like the wind"), *Śīlā*, XII. 7. (4x)
162. stars (sari): *uday-tārā sāṛī* ("sari with rising stars"), *Mahuyā*, XVIII. 49. (4x)
163. fire (sari): *agnipāṭer sāṛī* ("sari with a border like fire"), *Kamalā*, III. 19. (14x)
164. mountains (waves): *parbat parmāṇ ḍheu* ('waves like mountains"), *Jīrālanī*, XIII. 6. (2x)
165. flower (star): *āsmānete phuṭe tārā* ("stars blossom on the sky"), *Ratan*, III. 25. (6x)
166. honey (phālgun): *madhumās* ("the month of honey"), *Āndhā bandhu*, V. 3. (2x)
167. moon (house or town): *dekhite sundar bāṛī chānder samān* ("the beautiful house looks like the moon"), *Maluyā*, IX. 36. (11x)
168. mouth (river): *ḍheu phenā mukhe laiyā* ("waves with foam in their mouths"), *Āynā*, IX. 9. (4x)
169. dance (bird): *nāchichhe khanjanā* ("the khanjan dances"), *Sonābibi*, 28. (2x)
170. play (wind): *līluyārī bātās* ("playful wind"), *Kamalā*, XV. 212. (10x)

As noted above, there are about five hundred metaphors and similes, each of which occurs in the Mymensingh ballads once only; for this reason we are not justified in ranking them among those which form the common fund of poetic images. Of course, we must remember that the single representation of some of these similes and metaphors may be due to the circumstance that we had to make our analysis on the basis of materials which are far from complete; it is very probable that many poetic images, classified as exception here, would be found again in other folk-songs from

Mymensingh. Therefore a very cautious approach is necessary.

For these reasons I do not presume to draw any conclusions from about four hundred similes and metaphors, each represented in a single instance; but in character, at least, they certainly resemble other images belonging to the common fund. Thus about one hundred similes and metaphors remain which may be considered exceptional.

Let us, now, confront the common fund of metaphors and similes with those represented in a single case each. We may expect that the general tendencies of the Mymensingh folk-poetry or folk-epics, at least, towards considering certain objects as apt to be used in poetic images, should find their expression in the negative way, too, *i.e.*, in refusing to accept other similes and metaphors into the common fund; these poetic images would, then, appear only once and would not be repeated or imitated in other ballads. We shall, of course, pay attention only to the contents of these images, regardless of their form.

More than thirty are poetic images of Nature. In this respect, it confirms our previous conclusion that the Mymensingh folk-epics do not tend to describe Nature and its beauties. It is interesting to note that these similes and metaphors are widely scattered throughout the ballads—there is hardly any ballad without at least one exceptional poetic image.

Let us quote a few instances of these images, many of which are very beautiful:

> *dhanu hāte laiyā Madan pushpete lukāy* ("the god Madan hides in flowers, a bow in his hand"), *Kamalā*, XV. 90.

baner birak ojhāre dekhya māthāy dhare chhātā ("look, the forest tree holds an umbrella over the physician's head"), *Pīr*, III. 10.

koil ḍāke baner ghare ("the cuckoo calls in the chamber of the forest"), *Bagulā*, III. 9.

basanta rākhyāchhe bāṅdhiyā kumār bāgāne ("the prince bound the springtime to his garden"), *Jīrālanī*, VI. 35.

latāy pātāy śobhe hīrāman hār ("strings and pearls gleam on the creepers and leaves"), *Kaṅka*, XVIII. 62.

pūbsāyare lāimyā bhānure bhorer chhān kare ("the sun descends into the Eastern sea to take its morning bath"), *Kamalārāṇī*, X. 5.

śrāban āsila māthe jaler pasarā ("the month of Śrāban came, a load of rain on its head"), *Kaṅka*, XVIII. 65.

chitanā phāgun sakal māser rājā ("it is Phālgun, the king of all the months"), *Bagulā*, IX. 1.

gāchher galā dhairā kāndi ("I weep, embracing the neck of the tree"), *Sannamālā*, III. 62.

āila āshāṛh mās laiyā megher rāṇī ("with the month of Āshāṛh, the queen of clouds came"), *Āynā*, III. 9.

ākhi melyā chāy pushper nā kali ("the bud opens its eyes"), *Āndhā bandhu*, VI. 11.

nayā basan nayāre bhūshan pare birakshalatā ("trees and creepers wear new clothes and jewels"), *Bagulā*, IX. 3.

din rāiter parī tomrā ["you (*i.e.*, sun and moon) are the fairies of day and night"], *Mānjurmā*, VI. 59.

It is quite possible that some of these similes and metaphors might be found in classical Bengali poetry; but they will be hard to find.

So far our analysis of the individual similes and metaphors has required no more detailed classification. After all, the basis of all these *tropes* was the same: putting two different subjects into mutual relation or opposition on the ground of some feature common to both. Thus they comprise, in the main, the simile, the metaphor and the periphrasis. Naturally, there are other kinds of tropes to be found in the Mymensingh ballads, too, such as *synecdoche, litotes, euphemism, hyperbole*, etc., but they appear rather rarely in our ballads and are certainly not characteristic features of the folk-epics from Mymensingh.[89]

Let us turn our attention, now, to the *form* of the poetic images and to the stylistic differences and variants occurring within the individual groups obtained on the ground of common comparata. The basic representative of the tropes is undoubtedly a simile, bare simile (x like y) which may be, then, enriched and developed in different directions. It is not, perhaps, far-fetched to suppose that the ability to develop or elaborate a bare simile is directly dependent on the maturity of poetic technique. It will also be useful to trace the stylistic variants of the individual images and especially their stylistic constancy.

Let us take, as an instance, the numerous group of similes and metaphors, as the archetype of which we may take "a human being like the moon"; useless to say that this simile is neither specifically Bengali (it occurs frequently, for instance, in classical Sanskrit poetry), nor Indian.

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[89] After long consideration, I have refrained also from dividing and classifying the individual poetic images into numerous groups and sections, as is done in the Bengali textbooks of poetics, such as the excellent *Alaṅkār-chandrikā* by Syamapada Chakravarti, because I am afraid it would not make the present study more lucid in any way.

Its basic type, in the first degree of stylistic development, has the most simple formulation : 'a woman (or a man) like the moon' (with comparative particle *samān*, *mata*, *matan*, *hena*); in the second degree, the person is replaced by *mukh* (face) or *rūp* (form, beauty), and/or the adjective *sundar* (beautiful) or the adverb *dekhite* (to look at) is added; e.g., *chānder matan rūp dekhite sundar* ["(her) form looks as beautiful as the moon"], *Dhopār pāṭ*, VII. 5. In such a stylization, the simile is to be found 31 times, in the Mymensingh ballads. From these basic types, the development continues in the following directions :

I. 1. The comparatum 'moon' (either bare or unfolded) is changed into an attribute [*āmār nā Sannamālā punnumāsīr chān* ("my Sannamālā, the full-moon"), *Sannamālā*, I. 28], until finally it becomes completely independent as a periphrastic *āmāder chānd* (our moon) meaning, for instance, 'our daughter' (*Māṇiktārā*, V. 234) ; there are 10 such cases to be found in the Mymensingh ballads.

2. Quite stereotype and fixed has become the compound 'moon-face', appearing in variants either grammatical *chānd-mukh* ('tadbhava') and *chandramukh* ('tatsama'), or lexical *chāndbadan* and *chāndbayān*. I found it 28 times in the ballads, with a marked preference for *chāndmukh* (20 instances). This compound[90] is so constant that we find it even in metaphors such as *chānd*

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[90] Cf. *Alaṅkār-chandrikā*, by Syamapada Chakravarti, Indian Associated Publishers, Calcutta (2nd Ed.), 1957, p. 55.

jiniyā kanyer chandramukhkhāni ["the moon-face of the girl surpasses the moon (in its beauty)"], *Bheluyā*, II. 24 (also *Firoz*, IV. 18). It is apparent that this association has become an idiom, a synonym for 'the beautiful face'.

Equally constant, though not so frequent (6 instances), is the classical *chandramukhī*, taken over from Sanskrit ; it is a *Bahuvrīhi* compound, a type which is unproductive in Bengali.

II. In a series of farther similes and metaphors, too, the comparatum 'moon' is enriched and elaborated either by attributes (1), or in sentences (2).

1. Someone is compared to 'the moon in the sky' (*āsmāner chānd*), to 'the full-moon' (*punnumāsīr chānd*)—relatively frequent (21 cases), and to 'a moonbeam' (*chānder chhurat*—11 cases), e.g., *āmār soyāmī yeman āsmāner chān* ("my husband is like the moon in the sky") [*Maluyā*, XII. 103]; *ek putra āchhe tār pūrnimāsīr chān* ("he has one son, the full-moon") [*Maishāl*, A, I. 3]; *chandrer chhorat kanyā* ("the girl, a moonbeam") [*Kānchan*, IX. 17]. Only the abovementioned three combinations may be considered stereotype, but not their stylistic wording.

2. The comparatum 'moon' is taken in a fixed situation ; thus it is no more the case of a simile used regardless of circumstances. The following example will show what I mean : The situation in which the reflection of a beautiful face (either male or female) is depicted, is circumscribed by a simile : "like the moon (the full-moon) floating on the water (in the river's

whirlpools, in the waves)" [*Pīr*, IV. 7; *Chandrāvatī*, XII. 121 ; *Bheluyā*, III. 39]. In the first two instances, a man is described drowning, but in the last instance it is a description of a girl bathing in the river and watched by a merchant, from his boat. It is an image quite concrete, taken from everyday, but, for a sensitive eye, always a beautiful reality ; you can imagine how impressive and romantic is the reflection of the full-moon on the surface of a wide Indian river, on a clear night. Such an image is one with which every Bengali villager is familiar and has all the qualities fitting it to be accepted into the fund of common poetic folk-images, because of its aesthetic value and the emotions it helps to arouse. What is, however, more interesting, in connection with the subject of the present chapter, is the fact that the simile has become so stereotype that the folk-poets do not even change the verb *bhāsā* (to float), though other variants would be equally suitable (*e.g.*, to be reflected, to bathe, etc.). An art-poet would certainly prefer a more individualized variant.

The other case which may be included in the same category is the image 'the face like the moon was covered by clouds' (*chānder samān mukh meghete ḍhākila*) [*Bheluyā*, III. 35] with a very close variant 'as if the full-moon was covered by clouds' (*meghete ḍhākila yeman punnumāsīr chān*) [*Kānchan*, XXII. 44]. The beautiful face covered by hair is described here, either in bathing (the former quotation) or because of sorrow (the latter case). It is also a very concrete image and it consistently uses one verb *ḍhākā*. But, as in the previous example, here a certain poetic image is not reserved for a certain situation, but rather for its visual result. In the first illustration, we had always a face reflected on the water, but once it was the face of a drowning man and the other time, of a girl bathing; in the second instance, we have, once, a description of a girl bathing, and the other time, of a woman in deep sorrow. We shall return to this simile later on. Finally, we may include in the present category images of the type 'as if the moon were to fall to earth'. They occur in 8 cases, but in comparatively different variants :

(*a*) *ākāśer chānd yeman jamine paṛiyā* ("as if the moon were to come down to earth from the sky") [*Mahuyā*, XVI. 3]; thus the girl sees her beloved asleep. Two variants may be quoted, very close, both stylistically and in situation : *khasiyā āsmāner chānd bhumyete paṛila* ("the moon slipped away from the sky and fell to earth") [*Kānchan*, IX. 29] and *chānd yemān nāmiyechhe āsmān chhāṛiyā* ("as if the moon would come down from the sky") [*Jīrālanī*, III. 29]; in both these cases, the image interprets the impression of somebody seeing a beautiful person. Yet another variant may be classed here : *āsmāner chānd kena jamine bichhān* ("why has the moon from the sky its bed on earth?") [*Sannamālā*, III. 21], interpreting the impression of the man seeing a girl asleep.

(*b*) There is another variant of the latter metaphor, stylistically very close, but with a considerable emotional shift and change of situation : *punnumāsīr chānd āsmān chhāṛiyā kena bandhu jamine bichhān* ("you are the full-moon, my friend, why have you left the sky and made your bed on earth?") [*Śyām*, III.

9-10]. In these words, a woman from the lowest caste addresses a prince who has asked for her love, being a periphrasis of the social inequality of two persons. These two variants only confirm our conclusion that a poetic image may become stereotype stylistically, but the situation and context in which it is used may show originality.

The same emotional colouring and meaning as the latter metaphor is shared by the variant: *chānd haiyā kena jamine bāṛāo hāt* ("why do you, the moon, stretch out your hand towards the earth?") [*Dhopār pāṭ*, I. 28]; it appears in a situation almost identical with that of the preceding case.

(*c*) The combination of 'the moon' and 'the earth' is to be found, finally, in two poetic images, very different, in all respects, from the previous similes and metaphors: *chānd janmila yemun jaminer kole* ("as if a moon were born in the lap of the earth") [*Mukuṭ*, I. 12--a beautiful son of the king was born] and *sonār chānd yamine luṭhāy* ("the golden moon rolls about on the earth") [*Firoz*, VIII. 185—a dead woman is lying on the earth]. I am afraid no definite conclusions may be drawn from these two cases.

III. The starting-point for another fairly numerous group is supplied by the most characteristic feature of the moon, its light or shine. Fourteen images are based on it which may be divided into two categories:

(*a*) Moonshine is used to express the beauty of a person, preferably of a girl or woman. The verb 'to gleam' (*jhalmal* or *jhilmil karā*) is chosen in four variants, stylistically very close to each other, such as : *chānder samān mukh kare jhalmal* ("her face gleams like the moon") [*Kamalā*, III. 3; cf. *Maluyā*, X. 58; *Firoz*, II. 7 and III. 112], and the verb 'to shine' (*jvalā*) in two cases : *chānder chhorat tār sarba aṅga jvale* ("her whole body shines, a moonbeam") [*Kamalā*, V. 161] and *purīmājhe jvale kanyā chānder pasarā* ("the girl, a moonbeam, shines amidst the town") [*Maishāl*, A, IV. 4]. The remaining two images differ more, stylistically, from the previous ones : *rūpete rosnāi kare chāndmā yeman* ("she shines in beauty like the moon") [*Kamalā*, V. 20] and *ābher gāy chānder kiraṇ temun śobhā pāy* ("so the moonbeam shines on the body of the clouds") [*Śīlā*, II. 86].

(*b*) The following three images are based on the result of the moonshine, the illumination of something (*ujjvalā* or *ālo karā*) : *chānder paśare yeman ghar haila ujalā* ("as if a room were illuminated by moonbeams") [*Kamalā*, I. 30], *dui chānde rājpurī ujjvalā haila* ("the capital was illuminated by two moons"), *i.e.*, two queens [*Tilak*, XII. 34] and *bhādra māser chānni yeman dekhāy Gāṅger talā/ brikshatale gele kanyā brikshatal ālā* ("when the girl went under a tree, it was lit up, just as the moon in the month of Bhādra reveals the bed of the Ganges") [*Kaṅka*, V. 5-6]. All these uses differ considerably from each other, and especially the latter is but a free variation of the same poetic idea. We have found, however, other three variants, based on the same connection, which are much closer to each other and, moreover, have become stereotype in a quite fixed context; they express a father and mother's tender love for their girl, resp. daughter-in-law. Let us quote all of them : *bhāṅgā gharer chānder ālo āndhāir gharer bāti* ("you are the moonlight in a tumbledown house, a lamp in a dark room") [*Maluyā*, XIX. 33] ; *bhāṅgā ghare chānder ālo diyāchhe bidhātā* ("God has sent moonlight into a tumbledown house") [*Jīrālanī*, XI. 23] ; *bhāṅgā ghare chānder ālo śuna mahājan* ("listen, merchant, she is the moonlight in a tumbledown house") [*Jīrālanī*, XI. 58]. The combination of 'moonlight' with 'a tumbledown house' results in a very specific poetic image ; and, if we may conclude from our three instances, it is also used in a rigid set of circumstances. This would represent the upper limit of stereotype use of poetic images in folk-poetry : a constant image in a constant stylization, reserved for a constant situation or relation.

IV. It would be possible to reduce all the previous cases to one archetype : 'somebody like the moon'. By a slight shift towards hyperbole, a new basis for another series of metaphors is obtained : 'somebody more beautiful than the moon'. In 5 cases, the verb *jinā* (to defeat) is used, e.g., *chānd jiniyā rūp dekhite sundar* ("her form defeating the moon looks beautiful") [*Firoz*, IV. 82] or *chānd jiniyā kanyer chandramukhkhāni* ("the girl's moon-face surpassing the moon") [*Bheluyā*, II. 24].

As if wanting to continue along the lines suggested by the previous metaphor, the folk-poets present the moon, surpassed by the beauty of a person, hiding behind clouds in shame (*Kamalā* XVII. 14; *Kaṅka*, V. 11), turning pale with envy (*Bheluyā*, VII. 52 and IX. 24), hoping to be able to leave the sky (*Kamalā*, V. 34), being shamed by the girl's beauty (*Kājal*, XV. 7), etc. In all these cases, only the poetic idea is taken over which the poets treat in different ways, using different words and creating different variants.

We have not exhausted all the poetic images having 'the moon' as their basis. There are about 25 more similes and metaphors, besides personifications of the type 'the moon weeps over him or her', each of which must be taken to lie outside the common fund of poetic images, as it is to be found in one instance only.

In the prosaic portions of the fairy-tales from Mymensingh, included in the edition of ballads, four instances are to be found, *viz.*, three similes of the basic type *chānder samān rūp* ("form like the moon") [*Sannamālā*, p. 284, I. 5], *chānder matan sundar kumār* ("the prince beautiful as the moon") [*Madankumār*, p. 283, I. 16-17] and *tār chānder chhaṭā rūp* ("her beauty like a moonbeam") [*Kājalrekhā*, p. 328, I. 1]. The fourth instance is the periphrastic *chānd-suruje milan* ("the meeting of the moon with the sun") [*Sannamālā*, p. 381, I. 17-18], describing the meeting of two young people.

Let us sum up the conclusions to be drawn from the analysis of this category of similes and metaphors :

1. A certain percentage of these poetic images (about 15%) becomes stereotype at a basic stage of development.

2. Approximately the same proportion becomes fixed in the second stage of development, *i.e.*, in a slightly developed form.

3. A higher degree of development of the basic simile into a metaphor, the smaller number of stereotype uses.

4. Combinations of metaphoric origin sometimes become so stereotype that they cease to be felt as metaphors at all.

5. In the process of fixation, the developed similes and metaphors come under three groups :

(*a*) a certain stylistic (and lexical) combination becomes stereotype, but can be used in different situations ;

(*b*) the combination of a certain object with another object becomes stereotype, but it is expressed in different stylistic variants ;

(*c*) a certain poetic image in a fixed phrase and reserved for a certain situation becomes stereotype ; this case is much rarer than the preceding two.

The analysis of the other similes and metaphors, with common comparata, brings analogous results. It is practically impossible to deal with these groups in such detail; let us, therefore, confine ourselves to a few instances :

The comparatum 'flower' (bloom, bud) has a frequency count of nearly 100 instances. Here also, groups similar to those in the preceding case may be formed, from the basic simile "a girl (a face) beautiful like a flower (a bloom, a bud)", up to fairly elaborate metaphors. The former simile is to be found, in different variants, nearly 30 times. But it should be noted that out of these thirty instances, only four are practically identical : *mukhete phuṭṭā uṭhe kanak chāmpār phul* (Mahuyā, I. 31), *mukhe ta phuṭiyā kanyā śatek chāmpā phul* (Mukuṭ, I. 60), *mukhete phuṭechhe Sunāir go śatek chāmpār phul* (Bhābnā, II. 16) and *mukhete phuṭechhe Sunāir go śatek padmaphul* [Bhābnā, I. 6] ("on/Sunāi's, the girl's/face/a hundred/champa-/lotus-/blooms blossom"). All the other similes find a different formulation to express the same poetic idea ; they use different verbs, change the name of the flower (the lotus and the *champā* remaining the most frequent, however), enrich the basic members of the simile by various attributes, etc. For instance :

> *bayān śobhichhe yeman phuṭā pauder phul* ("[her] face gleams like an unfolded lotus-bloom") [*Firoz*, III. 1] ;
>
> *mukher baraṇ kanyār sonā chāmpā kali* ("the colour of the girl's face is like a golden champā-bud") [*Mukuṭ*, I. 60] ;
>
> *hāsile badane phuṭe mallikār rāśi* ("when she smiles, a heap of mallikā-blooms open on her face") [*Kamalā*, V. 32], etc.

Even within this group, however, we may find poetic images which have reached a considerable degree of constancy and stereotypeness. Thus the periphrastic 'the bloom withered' serves to express, most frequently, the sadness and sorrow of a girl or woman abandoned by her beloved or husband. I found it used in this way ten times, in the following formulations :

> *malin chānder ālo phul haila bāsī* ("pale is the moonlight, the flowers withered") [*Kaṅka*, XVI. 9] ;
>
> *tārā haila jhilimili phul haila bāsi* ("the stars gleam, the flowers withered") [*Āynā*, XI. 104] ;

tomār mālanche phul bāsī haiyā yāy ("the flowers in your garden wither") [*Kaṅka*, XVII. 12];

ekrātre phuṭā phul jhuirā haila bāsi ("the flowers opened one night withered") [*Chandrāvatī*, XII. 8];

mālanche phuṭiyā phul jhairā haila bāsī ("the flowers opened in the garden withered") [*Kaṅka*, XVIII. 16];

kāli ye phuṭiyā kali āij haila bāsi ("the bud which opened yesterday withered today") [*Kānchan*, XV. 16];

biyāne phuṭiyā phul hānjā belā khase ("the flower which opened in the morning withered in the evening") [*Firoz*, VIII. 85];

āijer nā phuṭā phul re kāil ye haiba bāsi ("the flower which opened today will wither tomorrow") [*Bhāraiyā*, 232];

phuṭiyā baner phul pairā gela jhari ("the forest-bloom which opened withered later") [*Maishāl*, B, V. 19];

bāgbāgichāy pushpa nā kali malin haila ("flowers and buds in the garden withered") [*Kamalārāṇi*, VI. 10].

I have quoted all the instances to enable the reader to see for himself various combinations and variations derived by the folk-poets from the basic idea and metaphor. The withering of a flower is not reserved, however, only to express sorrow; the flowers wither, when confronted with a girl's beauty [*Kaṅka*, V. 9-10; *Āynā*, IV. 41-42], and the 'bloom of youth' or 'bud of youth', which is a favourite metaphor in the Mymensingh ballads, threatens to wither away, before its honey is drunk by a bee [*Kamalā*, V. 71-72; *Maluyā*, X. 63-64 etc.].

The most homogeneous section of the 'flower'-group is formed by nine metaphors using invariably the same species of plant, *śeolā* ('saibāl'), the water-moss, to denote helplessness, e.g., : *suter heolā aiyā bhāisyā berāi* ("I am floating like the water-moss in a stream")[91] [*Mahuyā*, V. 26]. The same metaphor, with quite negligible phonetic or grammatical deviations, is to be found in *Kaṅka*, IV. 9 and *Kānchanmālā*, IX. 24, nor do the remaining six variants differ from it in any essential point :

> *sroter śeolā haiyā bhāsila sāyare* ("on the sea") [*Bheluyā*, XI. 44];
>
> *suter seolā yemun bhāsyā bhāsyā phire* (adding the comparative particle 'like') [*Śīlā*, I. 19];
>
> *suter seolā yemun bhāsiyā beṛāi* (ditto) [*Pīr*, VI. 29];
>
> *jaler śeolā-sama bhāsiyā berāi* (ditto and replacing 'the stream' by 'the water' [*Rūpavatī*, V. 26];
>
> *suter śeolā yeman sute kare bhar* ("like the water-moss in the stream leans on the stream") [*Tilak*, IX. 62]; it is a very significant example—the twofold use of 'the stream' shows the stereotypeness of the connection 'the water-moss in the stream';
>
> *pānir mukhe seolār mata āmi bhasiyā beṛāi* ("I am floating like water-moss in the mouth of water") [*Āynā*, X. 18].

We could hardly find more apt illustrations of how certain similes and metaphors become stereotype, being reserved, at the same time, for a fixed situation or mood. It should be noted also that each of the above-quoted instances is to be found in a different ballad. Besides, we can show, in a quotation from the ballad *Āndhā bandhu*, VII. 81, how deeply rooted must be the association of '*sroter śeolā*' with the idea of helplessness, in the minds of folk-poets; in that verse which belongs to the concluding ones of the ballad, the princess and the Blind Friend are described carried away by the river to meet their death. I consider it significant that the poet did not use *śeolā* in this case, but preferred another plant, *sāplā* (the water-lily): *joyāriyā Gāṅge ḍheuye sāpal phul bhāse* ("the water-lily is floating in the stormy Ganges").

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[91] The metaphoric use of *sroter śeolā* is quoted by D. C. Sen also from Chandidas, cf. *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, II. 2., p. 95, note 1.

We have said already that among the similes and metaphors to be found in the Mymensingh ballads, some are probably no longer felt as poetic images at all; they have become elements of colloquial speech and their use is far from being restricted to poetry. Naturally it is sometimes very difficult to draw the border-line between an idiom which has sunk from the poetic language into the colloquial one, and a true metaphor or simile. We shall therefore quote all these cases, the most prominent feature of which is their frequency:

1. "gold" (*sonā*): In more than 80 cases, the noun *sonā* is used, usually in the genitive, as a circumlocution for either 'beautiful' or 'dear', e.g., *sonār tanu* (golden body) [*Kaṅka*, V. 74; *Bheluyā*, IV. 39 etc.], *sonār mā* (golden mother) [*Bāratīrther gān*, 58], *sonār yauban* (golden youth) [*Śīā*, II. 27; *Āynā*, IX. 53; *Kaṅka*, XXII. 37 etc.], etc.; we find even such combinations as *sonār ṭhonṭ* (golden lips) [*Firoz*, VIII. 83] or *sonār atith* (golden

guest) [*Maluyā*, VI. 16]. Very favourite is also the combination *kānchā sonā* (pure gold), as indicated by 15 instances of its use in the ballads. In 14 verses, I found the combination *sonār baraṇ* or *kānchā sonār baraṇ* (golden colour or colour of pure gold), e.g. *kanyār sonār baraṇ tanu* ("the girl has a body, the colour of pure gold") [*Bheluyā*, II. 21].

2. "treasure" (*dhan*): In 44 cases, it serves to denote a person very dear to somebody, for instance the son, daughter, wife, etc. Thus we often find *māyer dhan*, *bāpdhan* (the mother's or the father's treasure), *buker dhan* or *parāṇer dhan* (the heart's treasure), but even forms of addresses, such as *dhane* instead of 'my son' [*Kamalāraṇī*, III. 49].
3. "eat my head" (*āmār māthā khāo*) is a peculiar kind of very emphatic entreaty, which can be heard in everyday speech. In our ballads, it occurs 19 times.
4. "heart, soul" (*prāṇ*): Usually in the genitive (or as the first member of a compound), it means 'dear', e.g. *prāṇer bhāi* (dear brother) [*Kamalā*, XV. 146] or *prāṇ sai* (dear friend) [*Bheluyā*, IX. 55]; in this sense it is used more than 60 times in the ballads. It appears even in associations such as *ek kanyā āchhe mor parāṇer parāṇ* ("I have one daughter, the soul of my soul") [*Āndhā bandhu*, III. 45, *cf.* also *Śilā*, II, 41 and *Mukuṭ*, II. 111].
5. "mad, crazy" (*pāgāl*, *pāglā*, *bāurā*): In more than one hundred instances, the periphrastic 'to go mad', 'to turn crazy' helps to express the passion of love or, less frequently, emotions like anger, sorrow, etc. For instance: *tomār lagiyā kanyā hailām ye pāglā*" ("I went mad because of you,

girl") [*Bhābnā*, IV. 43], *sei nārī hārāiyā rājā haila bāurā*" ("the king went mad, having lost that woman") [*Kamalārāṇī*, VI. 21].

6. "forehead" (*kapāl*) : The old Hindu belief that everybody has his fate inscribed invisibly on his forehead, is the basis not only of frequent idioms of the type *ki jāni lekhyāchhe bidhi kapāle āmār* ("I don't know what fate has inscribed on my forehead") [*Chandrāvatī*, VI. 16], but also of the periphrastic use of 'forehead' instead of 'fate', e.g., *dāruṇ kapāler doshe* ("by the fault of cruel fate") [*Āynā*, XI. 42], or *mor kapāl bhāṅgila* ("my fate is sealed") [*Firoz*, VIII. 96]. As known, the idiom *poṛā kapāl* in the meaning of 'ill fate', is very frequent in the colloquial Bengali of today.

7. "fire, to burn" (*āgun, jvālā*) : The largest group of similes and metaphors to be found in the ballads is that based on 'fire' and its synonymic derivations ; no less than 150 cases could be quoted. Leaving aside 7 similes comparing somebody's beauty to fire, 14 verses in which *agnipāṭer sāṛī* ("a sari with a fire-border," *i.e.* with a border of red colour) is used, and 13 metaphors expressing an unhappy turn of events or catastrophe by the means of the idiom "to set on fire" *śītal mandire mor lāgila āguni* ("my cool room was set on fire") [*Rūpavatī*, III. 135], all the other cases, more than one hundred in number, serve to heighten the intensity of the expressed subject, especially of some emotion like sorrow *duḥkhe aṅga jvale* ("the body burns in sorrow") [*Kamalā*, V. 42], anger (*gosvār āguni* : "the fire of anger") [*Pīr*, XIV. 1], love (*pirīter jvālā* : "the fire of love") [*Mukuṭ*, II. 114] or desire

(*maner āgun nibāo*: "extinguish the fire of my soul") [*Maluyā*, VI. 44]; also combinations like *peṭer jvālā* or *khidār jvālā* instead of hunger are quite common and also occur in the colloquial language. Even 'fire' may be farther intensified by the epithetic *ghashir* (of cowdung-cakes) or *tusher* (of the chaff), for instance: *āgete jānindruer pirīt tumi tosher āguni* ("I did not know before, oh love, that you are the fire of chaff") [*Pīr*, XII. 24]; this intensification is based on the fact that both cow-dung-cakes and chaff burn slowly and for a long time.

It is certainly no mere coincidence that all idiomatic similes and metaphors quoted above are to be found in the prosaic portions of the fairy-tales, too, e.g.: *āmār baṛa sohāger dhan* ("my very beloved treasure", *i.e.*, daughter) [*Tilak*, p. 386, I.16], *kapāler lekhā kaon yāy nā*" ("it cannot be said what is written on the fore-head") [*Madankumār*, p. 281, I.6], *rājputra rūp dekhiyā pāgal* ("the prince went mad at the sight of her beauty") [*Sannamālā*, p. 286, I.8], etc.

Again we must repeat that it is sometimes difficult, especially for a foreigner, to decide with certainty whether an originally metaphoric figure is still felt as a poetic image or whether it has lost its aesthetic colouring and has become a mere idiom.

Because of doubts which exist as to the genuineness of the Mymensingh ballads, it is necessary to pay special attention to the similes and metaphors found in the songs collected by Chandrakumar De and to those occurring in ballads sent by other collectors. That is, we must confront, from this point of view, *Māṇiktārā*, *Mānjurmā*, *Bāratīrther gān*, *Rājā Raghur Pālā* and *Bīrnārāyaṇer pālā* with the rest of the ballads.

Without any hesitancy, we may say that the similes and metaphors, taken as a whole, do not differ in any considerable respect between these two groups. As the ballads collected by Chandrakumar De represent a large majority of the songs edited by D. C. Sen, it is only natural that many tropes found in them do not appear in the ballads obtained from the other collectors, but the same general tendencies, the same preference for certain objects as suitable for the core of poetic images may be traced in both groups. Besides, we find a whole series of practically identical similes and metaphors in both groups of ballads. Let us quote some instances :

> *gharer Lakṣhmī bau ye āmār phiirā āisa ghare* ("return home, my daughter-in-law, Lakshmi of our house") [*Maluyā*, XIX. 32, also *Maluyā*, XI. 34 and *Dhopār pāṭ*, VI. 12, etc.] ; *āmār ghare āisa māo gharer Lakṣhmī haiyā* ("come to my house, my daughter, and be the Lakshmi of our house") [*Māṇiktārā*, V. 98] ;
>
> *tumi Gaṅgār pāni* ("you are the water of the Ganges") [*Chandrāvatī*, XII, 15, also *Rūpavatī*, IV. 63] ; *āmār nā Mānjurmā Gaṅgānadīr jal* ("my M. is the water of the Ganges") [*Mānjurmā*, VI. 63-64] ;
>
> *satīr nā pati yeman sāper māthāy maṇi* ("the husband is, for a chaste wife, like the jewel on the snake's head") *Kāñchanmālā*, X. 31] *sāper māthāy māṇik pati satīr kapāle* ("for a chaste wife, the husband is like the jewel on the snake's head") [*Māṇiktārā*, VII. 128] ;

tumi andher ye laṛī ("you are the blind man's stick" [*Firoz*, VIII. 123, also *Kamalārānī*, III. 48, *Āynā*, I. 18 and IV. 25] ; *māo bāper andaler naṛi* ("the blind man's stick of the parents"), *i.e.*, the son [*Māṇiktārā*, II. 22 and III. 65] ;

nidrāy achetan ("unconscious in sleep") [*Jīrālaṇī*, V. 29 and *Malayā*, X. 94; (ditto) *Māṇiktārā*, III. 100 and *Raghu*, II. 8] ;

kanyā āmār chaksher kājal ("the daughter is the collyrium of my eyes") [*Madankumār*, XIV. 13, also *Dhopār pāṭ*, XII. 35, etc.] ; *tuin dui chaksher kājāl* ("you are the collyrium of my two eyes") [*Māṇīktārā*, VII. 24, also *Mānjurmā*, VI. 61-62];

kanyār kāndan dekhi pāṣhāṇ galila ("the stone melted to see the girl weeping") [*Pīr*, XIV, 37, also *Kājalrekhā*, XX. 69, *Bhāraiyā*, 147, *Kaṅka*. XXIII. 59, etc.]; *kanyār kāndane pāttar yāy galiyā* ("the stone melts because of the girl's weeping") *Bīrnārāyaṇ* II. 29-30] ;

pīrit yatan pīrit ratan...pīrit galār hār ("love is care, love is a jewel...love is a necklace") [*Āynā*, VII. 21-22 ; (ditto) *Mānjurmā*, VI. 69-70] ;

tumi putra kalijār lau ye āmār ("you, my son, are the blood of my heart") [*Firoz*, VIII. 13, also *Bhāraiyā*, 468, *Madinā*, II. 59, etc.]; *Mānjurmā ye āchhila amār...kalijār lau* ("M. was the blood of my heart") [*Mānjurmā*, VI. 41-42, also *Māṇiktārā*, VII. 24) ;

megher baraṇ chul ("hair, the colour of clouds") [*Bheluyā*, XII. 21 and 11 other instances] ; *āsmāner kālā megh tomār māthār chul* ("the hair on your head is the black cloud in the sky") [*Bīrnārāyāṇ*, V. 12] ;

poshaṇīyā pankhī mor phāṭila śikali ("my tame bird broke its chain") [*Rūpavatī*, III. 138, also *Ratan*, VI. 18 and *Maishāl*, B, V. 37]; *pinjirār ṭiyā pankhī śikali kāṭyā gela* ("the parrot left the cage, breaking its chain") [*Mānjurmā*, V. 59-60];

ek putra āchhila sādhur ander nayan ("the merchant had one son, the blind man's eye") [*Sannamālā*, III, 31, also *Gopinī* I. 53]; *nārīr kāchhe pati yemun andaler nayan* ("the husband is for a wife like a blind man's eye") [*Māṇiktārā*, VII. 129];

māo bāp kāindā kanyā tor andha karchhe ānkhi ("your parents, girl, are blind with weeping") [*Malayā*, VII. 33, also *Maishāl*, A, VIII. 15]; *Biśu kāindā andha hay* ("Biśu turned blind with weeping") [*Māṇiktārā*, II. 13];

Līlār uṛila parāṇ ("Līlā's heart flew away") [*Kaṅka*, XII. 61, also *Firoz*, VIII. 54, *Bheluyā*, IX. 216, etc.]; *ere dekhyā parāṇi gela ye uṛiyā* ("when he saw it, his heart flew away") [*Bīrnārāyaṇ*, VII, 20]; *yaubaner bhār* ("the burden of youth") [*Kamalā*, IV. 3 and *Malayā*, X. 7; (ditto) *Bīrnārāyaṇ* I. 47];

sei kanyā haiyāchhe āmār nayaner maṇi ("that girl became the apple of my eye") [*Firoz*, V. 67 and 20 other instances] *Mānjurmā ye āchhila āmār . . . nayaner maṇi* ("M. was the apple of my eye") [*Mānjurmā*, VI. 37-38];

buker kalijā mor ("the heart in my breast" *i.e.* the wife) [*Madinā*, VII. 96, also *Śyām*, X. 59, etc.]; *Bāsuk ye kalijā āmār* ("B. is my heart") *Māṇiktārā*, III. 65, also *Mānjurmā*, VI. 65-66].

I have chosen only a few instances, but I hope they are convincing enough to prove that the similes and metaphors found within the both groups of the ballads belong to the same stock and thus only confirm our belief that the ballads collected by Chandrakumar De are genuine folk-products.

Also the comparison of the Mymensingh ballads with the folk-lyrics from Mymensingh, from the point of view of their poetic images, produces the same results. Though the number of songs I had at my disposal was relatively small, they contained more than 30 different similes and metaphors identical with those found in the ballads. The sources in which I found the songs were all volumes of the collection *Hārāmaṇi*, ed. by Md. Mansoor Uddin, Raośan Izdani's *Momenśāhir loksāhitya*, a few volumes of the Mymensingh journal *Saurabh* and the manuscript collection of folk-songs preserved by the Bengali Academy, Dacca, which I was kindly allowed to consult during my stay in Dacca, in 1960. I must add that all these materials undoubtedly come from Mymensingh; as the object of the present study is Mymensingh folk-poetry, I excluded both songs from other districts of East Bengal and songs of uncertain origin (*e.g.* some parts of *Hārāmaṇi* where the origin is not mentioned).

I shall quote the analogous similes and metaphors in the same order and with the same numbers as those from the ballads:

10. *āgun haite sundarī se* ("she is more beautiful than fire"), Izdani, 94.
13. *barṇe kāñchāsonā* ("the colour of pure gold"). *Hārāmaṇi*, I. 59

17. *āsmāner chān, pūrṇimāsir chān* ("the moon on the sky", "the fullmoon", *i.e.*, the bridegroom), *Hārāmāṇi*, III. 35.

28. *bāper chandramukh* ("the father's moon-face"), *Hārāmaṇi*, III. 39.

36. *mā pāshāṇī aiyā* ("mother turned to stone"), *Saurabh*, 16, 9, 265; or: *mā haye tumi etai pāshāṇ* ("though mother, you are such a stone"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

44. *yāohe phiriyā prāṇ bhamarā* ("come back, my dear bee"), Izdani, 53.

46. *bandhu āmār . . . andher nayan* ("my friend is the blind man's eye"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

50. *Kālā āmār galār mālā* ("K. is the garland round my neck"), Izdani, 64.

53. *māyer parāṇ* ("the mother's heart, *i.e.* Rām"), *Saurabh*, 16, 9, 265.

57. *āmār Nimāi baṃśer bāti* ("my N. is the lamp of the family"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

58. *āmi māyer nayantārā* ("I am the apple of my mother's eye"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

61. *svāmī baṛa dhan* ("the husband is a great treasure"), *Saurabh*, I. 9, 281.

62. *tumi aio kalpataru āmi aiba latā* ("be the wish-tree, I shall become a creeper"), Izdani, 30.

70. *phule nā basila ali thākite yaiban* ("no bee alighted on the flower in her youth"), *Hārāmaṇi*, IV. 47.

75. *yaiban karbām dān* ("I shall give my youth"), Izdani, 113.

77. *pīrit yatan pīrit ratan pīrit galār hār* ("love is care, love is a jewel, love is a necklace round the

neck"), Izdani, 39 (*cf.* literally *Āynā*, VII. 21-22 and *Mānjurmā*, 69-70).

78. *tāre deikhyā pāgal aila Ratan Ṭhākrer pulā* ("the son of R.T. went mad, when he saw her"), Izdani, 114.

79. *se preme matta haiyā āchhe* ("he is drunk with love"), *Hārāmaṇi*, I. 115.

80. *abhāgīr yaiban joyār haila keman* ("the tide of youth of the unhappy girl flowed away uselessly"), *Hārāmaṇi*, IV. 47.

98. *āmār duḥkhe kāindā mare baner pākhirā* ("the birds in the forest weep because of my sorrow"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

99. *āmār āśāte ke dila go chhāi* ("who turned my hopes to ashes"), Izdani, 52.

108. *yebā nārīr puruṣh nāi tār sabī āndherā* ("all is dark for the woman who has no husband"), Izdani, 5.

111. *kālijā jvale dekha āmār* ("look, my heart burns"), Beng. Acad., file 2 and a large number of other instances.

124. *prāṇe dāgā diyā dūre chailā yāy* ("he goes far away, giving a shock to my heart"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

125. *kālijāy mārilā śel* ("he pierced my heart with a spear"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

127. *buk bhese nayan jale* ("flooding the breast with tears"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

130. *dui janer kāndane hāyre gāchher pātā jhare* ("the tree sheds its leaves over the sorrow of both of them"), Beng. Acad., file 2.

133. *nīlār yauban bhāre hāṇṭite nā pāre* ("N. is unable to walk under the burden of her youth"), *Hārāmaṇi*, IV. 52.

134. *yauban joyārer pāni bhāṭā lāglei yābe* ("the stormy water of youth will subside, as soon as the ebb comes"), *Saurabh*, VI. 7. 167.
136. *āmar yaiban nadī ke bā dibe pāṛi* ("who will cross the river of my youth?"), *Hārāmaṇi*, IV. 47.
137. *yaibaner ḍiṅgā* ("the boat of youth"), *Hārāmaṇi*, IV. 58.
144. *bidhi ki lekhyāchhe mor kapāle* ("what has fate inscribed on my forehead?"), Beng. Acad., file 2.
170. *liluyā bayāre* ("in the playful wind"), Izdani, 38.

Though I have not quoted all the instances, I hope the list given above is convincing enough not only to testify to the authenticity of the Mymensingh ballads, but also to show that we are fully justified in speaking of a common stock of similes and metaphors; it shows that many poetic images are to be found, in the same form and context, both in the epic poetry and in the lyrical songs of the same region. I have no doubt that the majority of these poetic images would be found also in the folk-poetry of other districts of Eastern Bengal, nowadays Eastern Pakistan. But such investigation lies outside the scope of the present study and will have to be carried on later.

CONCLUSIONS

Before summing up the conclusions reached in my analysis of the Mymensingh ballads, let us survey the most recent contributions to the solution of the problem of their authenticity.

In order to provoke a discussion on this problem, I wrote an article in Bengali which appeared in the daily *Svādhīnatā*, on the 22nd April, 1962, under the title *Dineśchandra o Pūrbabaṅga gītikār prāmāṇikatā prasaṅge* (On Dineschandra and the Authenticity of the Eastern Bengali Ballads). In it, I summed up the main reasons which speak for the genuineness of these ballads and their folk-origin. In three weeks, the first article reacting to it was published, in the same daily (13th May, 1962), from the pen of the well-known folklorist Chittaranjan Deb, who brought additional arguments in favour of my standpoint. Let us quote a few lines, at least, from his article: "The main peculiarity of folk-literature is its ever-changing character. As folk-literature is a living phenomenon, the creative work of folk-poets did not stop with 'Mahuyā', 'Maluyā', 'Kāñchanmālā'. If you were to go from house to house in East Bengal (as Chandrakumar De spent day after day with peasants), you would discover that there still exist, in large numbers, stories like 'Āttāp sattāp' (*cf.* my book pallīgīti o pūrbabaṅga'), 'Guṇābibir jāri'. 'Nayān tār' and 'Champaklatā' (still unpublished) . . . It is not at all impossible to suppose that the Mymensingh ballads, in the form in which they were collected, slowly changed their main contents and stories, until they achieved a new form" (p. K, col. 5). In the remaining parts of his article, Chittaranjan Deb confutes the linguistic objections of those who query the authenticity of the ballads, and shows how unfounded are their doubts, based on the romantic colouring of these songs, the folk-songs collected by himself in East Bengal being similar in tone.

Under the same title as my article, another contribution by Rabindranath Gupta followed, in *Svādhīnatā*, on the 27th May, 1962. The author also supported my arguments ; in replying to the objections of Nandagopal Sengupta, based on the profound differences between the secularity of the Mymensingh ballads and the religiosity of the old Bengali art-poetry, he rightly stressed that "there is no sense in mixing up privileged art-literature with folk-poetry". In his view, the tradition of romantic stories has existed, in Bengal, since the Middle Ages and its beginnings can be traced to the Bengali Muslim literature. "Sufficient examples of this stream have not been preserved. And the folk-literature which then arose, as the result of the combined efforts of both Hindu and Muslim village poets, fell even more into oblivion. Chandrakumar De rescued only a few examples from being forgotten" (p. K, cols. 7-8).

Specially interesting is yet another article by Birendranath Palchaudhuri, which appeared in the same Daily, on the 12th June, 1962, under the title *Maimansiṃha gītikā o Pūrbabaṅga gītikār prāmāṇikatā prasaṅge* (On the Authenticity of the Mymensingh Ballads and Eastern Bengali Ballads). The author quotes a very acute observation by Rabindranath Tagore : "The Maṅgal-kāvyas and other epics of ancient Bengali literature are ponds dug on by order and at the expense of the rich, but the Mymensingh ballads are sources of living water, gushing out from the depth of the village heart—a pure stream of unsophisticated pain." Birendranath Palchaudhuri is a native of the same part of the Mymensingh District as Chandrakumar De, and he also knew the collector personally; thus he is able to confirm that Chandrakumar De never wrote a single line of poetry, but only collected folk-songs from the mouths of the villagers, with great trouble and under very difficult conditions. The author of the article himself heard, in 1931-32, what he calls "a recension of the ballad Mahuyā", performed by the Muslim drummer Kitab Ali and his group; there were deviations from the ballad as noted down by Chandrakumar De, both in form and content, but such differences may also be noted in various recensions of even such works as *Rāmāyaṇ* and Maṅgal-kāvyas. Speaking of the most profound difference between Bengali classical literature and folk-poetry, Birendranath Palchaudhuri rightly said: "In the ballads, village people's joys and sorrows, desires, hopes, protests and anger are reflected in various ways. . . . Therefore love in the love-stories of the ballads did not need to be presented in the guise of religion easily obtainable in the Maṅgal-kāvyas, the simple love of a Brahmin for a Gypsy girl or of a Zamindar for a washerwoman had not to be purified in the name of some god and goddess." And the author concluded that the outlook reflected in the ballads belongs to an old society, much older than the 18th century and even older than the Vaishnava poetry.

Pradipkumar De, the grandson of the collector Chandrakumar De, came forward with an article called *Bāṅglār kriṣhak-sāhityer śreṣhṭha udgātā Chandrakumār* (The Chief Preserver of the Bengali Peasant-Literature—Chandrakumar), published in *Svādhīnatā*, on the 5th

August, 1962. It is a contribution supplying much interesting information of the life and work of the great collector of the ballads.

A few days before concluding my present study, a remarkable book entitled *Baṅgasāhityer itihās : Prāchīn parba* (The History of Bengali Literature : Old Section)[92] was kindly sent to me by its author, Prof. Tarapada Bhattacharyya. The twenty-first chapter, *Nidhubābur ṭappā o Maimansiṃha gītikā* (pp. 354-76), is devoted to Eastern Bengali ballads, and also deals with the problem of their authenticity. The ideas contained in it are undoubtedly worth attention.

The author starts by confronting the so-called *ṭappā*-songs, by Nidhubābu (Rāmnidhi Gupta), with the Mymensingh ballads and concludes that "from the emotional point of view, ṭappā and the ballads belong to the same category. . . . They are poems of love and that love is human, not metaphysical. Such secular poems of love are something unusual in the old Bengali literature. But though they are unusual, poems of this kind are not without precedent. Instances of earlier secular epic poems on love are Padmāvatī and Bidyāsundar. There exist also examples of old love songs" (p. 354). The author shows that the tradition of secular love poetry, in the old Bengali literature, was killed by the religious fanaticism which did not care to preserve anything, in art literature, excepting works connected with religion, but notes that "the religious fanaticism of the Bengalis was not eternal. Religious hypocrisy and economic oppression assumed such dimensions that they opened the eyes of the Bengali nation and made the Bengali mind healthy and natural.

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[92] Published by S. Gupta Brothers, Calcutta, August, 1962.

Since then, love songs have been preserved, along with religious songs" (p. 355). And Tarapada Bhattacharyya concludes that "along with the poem Bidyāsundar, Nidhubābu's ṭappā and the Mymensingh ballads were born not in the age of old religious fanaticism, but in an auspicious moment, on the eve of modern times" (p. 355).

The author deals then, in more detail, with the *ṭappā*-songs which became, in their time, "the only songs of youth" and "rescued love from the mist of mythological romance" (p. 355), whereupon he passes on to the Mymensingh ballads which are, in his opinion, "in content and outlook literature of the modern mind, as are the ṭappā" (p. 361). Their modernism is based on the author's observation that "one of the characteristics of the modern Bengali mind is the consciousness of the value of this life as well as of time" (pp. 361-62); Tarapada Bhattacharyya sees an expression of this consciousness both in the secular themes of the ballads and in their relative shortness: "Performances of the Mymensingh ballads are not too long, they are compact, rich in content and their recital is completed in reasonable time, just because they are products of the modern age. Each ballad can be read within hours, not within days. They do not uselessly waste the reader's time, as did the old epics. Herein lies the modernism of the Mymensingh ballads" (p. 362).

On the ground of this modernist trait in the ballads, Tarapada Bhattacharyya refuses to accept Dineschandra Sen's dating and to consider them as old as the editor of the ballads did, and he concludes: "If we read the Mymensingh ballads attentively, it is obvious that only 'Kenārāmer pālā' may be a bit older, but all the other ballads are creations of the last parts of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth" (p. 363). And he adds: "Just because the Mymensingh ballads are historically modern, we cannot consider their inherent modern mentality to be anachronistic or unnatural" (p. 364).

The author also rejects the idea that the ballads could have been composed by uneducated or even illiterate poets: "The depiction of a finely differentiated psychology arising out of complicated and unusual situations is always beyond the powers of an illiterate poet. The explanation is simple—the poets of the ballads were all villagers and poor people, they did not expect to win kings and Zamindars as their listeners and so composed their ballads for uneducated, poor village people; setting aside the pride of their education and intellect and becoming one in mind with their uneducated audience, they composed the ballads in simple village language and style. But this does not mean that they were themselves uneducated. Therefore their poetic abilities and erudition are not concealed beneath the country vernacular, but glow here and there like a fire covered by ashes. Uneducated poetic talent may compose lullabies to charm children, but cannot create psychological ballads to charm scholars" (p. 365).

Tarapada Bhattacharyya notes that there are "subtle differences in the poetic abilities of the individual poets" (p. 366), resulting in differences in individual compositions, some of which he compares to short stories, others to novels, films, etc., for the ballad *Chandrāvatī*, he has words of warmest appreciation.

We shall refrain from quoting other interesting observations by Tarapada Bhattacharyya concerning the realism of the Mymensingh ballads, their humanistic approach, descriptions of nature, etc., and pass on to his couclusion : "The Mymensingh ballads are lotus-flowers rooted in the mud of village language. Though they arose in the most remote Eastern parts of Bengal, out of sight of people, they pleased the whole world by their fragrant breath. They give a true picture of Bengal. They are a permanent treasure of Bengali literature. The Vishnuist *padas* excepted, you would not find any similar epic poetry of love in the old Bengali literature. Nidhubābu's ṭappā are only emotional songs, not epic literature. The Mymensingh ballads are a convincing proof that the modern short story could have arisen quite naturally in Bengali literature, even had the English not come to Bengal" (p. 372).

In a short appendix attached to the final chapter of his book, Tarapada Bhattacharyya comments on the problem of the authenticity of the Mymensingh ballads, quoting, among others, the testimony of Kalidas Roy, that Chandrakumar De could never have composed the ballads himself, and a variant of the ballad *Mahuyā*, collected by Purnachandra Bhattacharyya in Eastern Bengal and published under the title *Bādyānīr gān*.

As the reader may see for himself, Tarapada Bhattacharyya's opinion does not differ considerably from mine, as far as the Mymensingh ballads are concerned. The question whether the authors of the ballads were illiterate or not does not play any decisive role : the most essential thing is the basically realistic approach to life reflected in the ballads, it being far more realistic than that found in the classical Bengali poetry.

Throughout my study, I have rather avoided the question of the age in which the ballads were composed, of their dating. Tarapada Bhattacharyya tries to prove that they belong to a modern age, more exactly that they cannot be older than the last part of the eighteenth century. I would not dare to be so exact. Some of the preserved variants of the ballads show that the stories have undergone development and that various recensions were created on the same foundations. The historical nucleus of some ballads must not mislead us into thinking that they were necessarily composed immediately after the happenings they describe. On the other hand, however, we can easily imagine that at least some of the ballads, in the form in which they have been preserved, are elaborations of older folk-stories. On the whole I am inclined to believe, with Tarapada Bhattacharyya, that the preserved versions are of relatively late origin. Do not let us forget the song *Bāratīrther gān* which is provided with an exact date of composition (1873) ; in its style, the song does not differ substantially from the other ballads. Besides, the individuality of various ballads has not been completely obliterated by oral tradition, as I tried to show in the course of my analysis and as testified by Tarapada Bhattacharyya, too. This fact would also point to their being a shorter rather than a longer time in circulation.

To sum up, we may, at least, believe with Tarapada Bhattacharyya that the majority of our ballads were given the form in which they were collected, at a much later time than Dineschandra Sen believed them to belong to.

To conclude our study, let us stress and repeat its essential points :

1. The arguments supporting the attack of various scholars on the authenticity of the Mymensingh ballads are far from convincing, when confronted with the results of a detailed analysis of the texts. There are feasible explanations for the fact that the ballads, in the form in which they were collected

and edited, do not survive today, the linguistic grounds put forward do not prove anything and the so-called romantic colouring of the ballads is not out of keeping with the spirit of Bengali folk-poetry, but only with the spirit of Bengali classical poetry to which, of course, the Mymensingh ballads do not belong.

2. The ballads could not have been given their present form by Chandrakumar De, as suspected by some people, nor by any other modern individual. They have, to a large extent, preserved the individuality of various folk-poets. Moreover, some of the ballads were collected by other collectors and yet do not differ considerably from those sent to D. C. Sen by Chandrakumar De. There are, besides, testimonies by various persons who themselves heard the ballads, in their youth or childhood, as well as articles in the Mymensingh journal *Saurabh*, in which not the hint of a doubt is expressed as to the authenticity of the ballads.
3. The ballads have not only parallels, in a few cases, but also their counterparts, in the so-called *puthis*, and their direct continuation in the existing folk-literature of present-day East Bengal.
4. The Mymensingh ballads form a more or less independent branch of Eastern Bengali folk-poetry. They differ from the classical poetry in the following characteristic features :
    (*a*) they were composed by individuals from among the village folk and for the village people, as is clearly evident from their general tendency, their essential realism and their approach to various problems of life;

(*b*) they are practically devoid of any religious implications ;

(*c*) they have a marked predilection for secular stories of love and for love tragedies;

(*d*) they were never written down, before being collected by modern collectors, but were preserved in the oral tradition.

The most essential characteristic in which the ballads differ from the rest of present-day Bengali folk-poetry, is the fact that they were probably never reproduced extempore, but always committed to memory, mostly by professional singers, which resulted in preserving, to a large extent, the individuality of various folk-balladists.

5. The Mymensingh ballads represent an offshoot of the Bengali literary tradition, carrying on the line of development of Bengali folk-poetry, as documented, for instance, in the folk-*Bāromāśīs*. The products of this offshoot have never gained official recognition, but they were very popular among the village folk of East Bengal for whom they were, along with *yātrās* and narrations of folk-tales, a favourite kind of folk entertainment.

6. Though, due to various economic, political and cultural reasons, the Mymensingh ballads seem to have died out in the form in which they are preserved in D. C. Sen's edition, their function has been taken over by the popular prints called *puthi*, on the one hand, and by recitals of the 'long songs' (*lambā gīt*), on the other. But the latter have never reached the same artistic level as that of the ballads.

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